

HORIZON

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

Vol. XVIII No. 108 December 1948

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE SEVEN ROCKS	Norman Nicholson 369
A CHANGE OF HEART	George Santayana 377
THE FOX	R. J. Manning 387
THE RAISON D'ÊTRE OF CRITICISM	E. M. Forster 397
NEGRO ART AND CUBISM	D. H. Kahnweiler 412
RUMBLE AMONG THE DRUMS	Alan Ross 420
SELECTED NOTICE:	
THE MIDDLE OF THE JOURNEY	Philip Toynbee 436
REPRODUCTIONS OF NEGRO ART AND PICASSO PAINTINGS appear between pages 416 and 417	

The Offices of HORIZON are at 53 Bedford Square, W.C.1. MUS: 3926.—
Annual Subscription 32s. net, including postage; 6 months 16s.; U.S.A. and Canada:
\$7.50 a year, single copies 75c. Agents for U.S.A.: Gotham Book Mart, 41 West
7th Street, New York City; Canada: The Jonathan David Co., 1501 St. Catherine
Street West, Montreal, 25; Norway: Narvesens Kioskkompani, Stortingsgata 2, Oslo.

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NORMAN NICHOLSON
THE SEVEN ROCKS
DIVERSSIONS ON A GROUND

Noi salivam per una pietra fessa
che si moveva d'una e d'altra parte,
sì come l'onda che fugge e s'appressa.

Purgatorio, Canto x, 7-9

(The Seven Rocks are the seven main types or groups of rock which form the body of the English Lake District and of the surrounding parts of Cumberland, Westmorland and Furness. They are dealt with in the following poem in the order of their geological antiquity.)

I

SKIDDAW SLATE
(ORDOVICIAN)

NIGHT falls white as lime; the sky,
Floury with cloud, reflects the rising glow
Of the cumulus of earth. Only
The seaward side of crags, the under-eaves
Of trees, west-looking windows, gates and gables
Unfrilled by snow, hold darkness still:
Elsewhere, the frost precipitates
The once dissolved, dry dregs of day. Heavy
With sediment of shadow, Black Combe stands—
A humped white paradox. The rocks
Are older than the snow, older than the mason ice;
Here the river of time in a delta spread
The bulged and buckled mud that heaves us firm
As faith above the misty minutes. The snow
Covers field and fence as a child's white muffler
Wrapped round the quarried ear. No thorn or scree
Fractures the rim, and the lower hills,
Fleecy as ewes at tupping time,
Lie flocked together. The Celtic tides
Ebb from the marsh and the buck's-horn plantain,

And Norse birds breaking their migratory flight
 Let on neolithic tombs, levered from the ribs of the rock.
 The grey decades
 Fade and stain the stone like lichen. The snow
 Holds the colour of the seasons
 Spinning into white, and time is frozen
 To a long shining icicle of light.

II

SCAFELL ASH

(ORDOVICIAN—BORROWDALE VOLCANIC SERIES)

THE skin of the snow
 Breaks and wriggles
 From the napes of the fells
 Like white snakes;
 And blue as gentians
 The smooth crags shoot
 From green sepals
 Of grass and moss.
 For now, before
 Daffodils light
 Like a powder fuse
 And damsons whitewash
 The orchards of the dale,
 Now is the time
 When the rocks flower
 High on their stalks,
 When the metal sap
 Of bracted craters
 Unfolds slowly
 In porphyry petals.

Hope is not looking
 Forward or onward,
 Is not of the future.
 Only the bone
 Can hope; only

The un-closed eye
 That learns (still staring)
 Never to see.
 Therefore hope
 Is a theological virtue
 And a geological grace,
 Felt in the why
 And wherefore of a rose,
 And when rocks solidify
 And the watching sky
 Knows the fire's purpose
 And the way the water flows.

III

CONISTON FLAG (SILURIAN)

SUNK like a moletrap in the field,
 Turfed with ash and poplar, sealed
 With bramble, strung with rush and ling,
 The quarry snares the early spring.
 Tipped with purple at the lip,
 Hellebore-green the strata dip
 And undulate like tracks of snails
 Written in silver on blue walls.
 Centuries of river mud
 Are combed in stone as grain in wood :—
 Beech-green, birch-green, holly, grey,
 Lichenized in pace-egg colours, gay
 With cochineal and onion-skin
 And rusty-bright as an old tin.
 Here a slate as hard as steel,
 Tubular moulding round the keel,
 Of plated rock, and here a shale
 That flakes and shaves to finger-nail.

The stream divides, the waves obey,
 Now charitable in decay ;
 And children lie in sighing beds—

HORIZON

A river floor above their heads;
 Safe in a woad-blue dream each crawls,
 An Ancient Briton in mud walls.
 When it disintegrates the stone
 Builds up a capital of its own.
 In dormer, porch and gable-ends,
 Chimney and windowsill, it blends
 Silt of a fossil-time of tides.
 Blue stone in every cleavage hides
 Brown-sugar crystals, dust of ore,
 The sand of that Silurian shore;
 With Kirkby Roundheads on the roof
 Purple as polyanthus, proof
 Against the flocking, mid-March weather,
 When the wind's wing and the gull's feather
 Fly screaming off the sea together.
 Lilac and winter jasmine fall,
 Yellow and mauve, on backyard wall,
 Dropping their petals on the slate—
 Slab paving laid from door to gate;
 And the roots' fingers, sopped with rain,
 Crumble the stone to mud again.

Kirkby Roundheads: round-headed roofing slates from Kirkby-in-Furness.

IV

ESKDALE GRANITE

(IGNEOUS INTRUSION IN OLD RED SANDSTONE)

Above the dint of dale,
 Meadows and mosses, by the side
 Of the cat-backed bridge where trailing waterweed
 Swivels now to the sea, now to the fell,
 At the pass and check of the round-the-corner tide;
 Above the salty mire where yellow flags
 Unwrap in the late upland-lambing spring;
 Above the collar of crags,
 The granite pate breaks bare to the sky
 Through a tonsure of bracken and bilberry.
 The eyes are hollow pots, the ears

Clustered with carbuncles, and in the evening
 The warts of stone glow red as pencil ore,
 Polished to a jewel, and the bronze brow wears
 Green fortitude like verdigris beneath a sleet of years.

V

MOUNTAIN LIMESTONE

(LOWER CARBONIFEROUS)

a. By the Kent Estuary

OUT of their shells the sea-beasts creep
 And eels un-reel from holes;
 With eyes of stone they stare and weep
 Green stalactites of tears;
 On sea-washed caves of years
 The temporal tide reclines and rolls,
 And miser molluscs, packed and pearled,
 Lie like a clutch of peewit's eggs
 In the stone conger's coils,
 Looped around the world.

Where flinty clints are scraped bone-bare
 A whale's ribs glint in the sun.
 Coral has built bright islands there,
 And birch and juniper fin the fell,
 Dark as a trawling under-wave,
 With rockrose opening three
 Green hands that cup the flower,
 And chiselled clean on stone
 A spider-web of shell,
 The thumb-print of the sea.

b. By the Duddon Estuary

SEE how the prudent stone,
 Secretive sea-beast bone,
 Holds, holds in the mould
 Rubies and blood-red gold,
 Veins of golden blood,
 Wired below the flood.
 Drop by drop the ore
 Drips, drips from the shore

HORIZON

Through hollow ribs of rock
 Where skeleton fingers lock
 Over the paunch of gold
 Bladders and blebs of old
 Distilled, filtered gold,
 As a new penny bright
 And red as haematite.

Long-shank diviners stand
 Prodding and probing the land,
 And steel nebs bore
 Down to the hoard of ore ;
 The coffers of the rock
 Spring open at the shock,
 And a new life is built upon
 The buried treasure of the bone.

VI

MARYPORT COAL (UPPER CARBONIFEROUS)

IN Inglewood, in Inglewood,
 The birk was blithe and blue ;
 The bracken scratched its antlers
 Where the leather trees grew.

Green twigs forked from the horns of deer,
 Red tongues flicked from the flower,
 And branches writhed like lizards
 In the wood-beast's bower.

Oh merry it was in the greenwood,
 All on a summer day,
 When the crested sun like a burning bird
 Dived through the simmering spray.

The fountains of the plunging ferns
 Poured bright fronds on the ground,
 And deep in a wave of boiling green
 The feathered sun was drowned.

And sand flowed over Inglewood,
 The sea rocked green as trees,
 And flung a froth of elderflower
 And a fret of blackberries.

Up spake a forest outlaw :
 ‘Let justice now be done—
 Under the waves of Inglewood
 We’ll drag for the bones of the sun.’

They dragged deep in the fronded sea,
 Deep in the rocking land ;
 They hooked the sun at the ebb of the green
 And cast it on the sand.

And buds and bells and spikes of flame
 Flowered from the black bones’ side ;
 And the seed of the sun burned back to the sun
 On the greenwood tide.

Inglewood: near Maryport, the West Cumberland coal-field touches the edge of the forest which once stretched from the Solway to the Eden. Strictly speaking, Inglewood was in the valleys of the Caldew and the Petteril, but in the Border Ballads (as here) the name was often applied to the whole of the forest area.

VII

ST. BEES SANDSTONE

(PERMIAN)

ACROSS red slabs of rock,
 I gaze down at the element that made them—
 The architectural sea. Now
 The same sea re-fingers back to sand
 That which it made from sand. The stone is grained,
 Smooth as walnut turned on a lathe,
 Or hollowed in clefts and collars where the pebbles
 Shake up and down like marbles in a bottle.
 Here the chiselling edges of the waves
 Scoop long fluted grooves, and here the spray
 Pits and pocks the blocks like rain on snow.
 Slowly the rock un-knows itself. The sea

Recoils, winding its springs; the black
 Bladderwrack congeals in scabs of blood
 About the pools where now the autumnal sky
 Cools green and salty. The chalky tideline
 Is rubbed out by the duster of the dusk.

The ribbon of life lies lightly on the surface—
 The borderline of sky and rock,
 Of the space above and the space below, and both
 Belong to the wide constituency of death.
 As mould on a stone or wrack at the sea's edge
 Life spreads its fronds and feelers.

Faith and hope
 Are incomprehensible here as a star to a starfish—
 Temperance alone is understood.

To wait, accept,
 To let the wind blow over and the sea
 Ebb and return, raise and destroy—that
 Is the one virtue; only so
 Can sky and sea and rock reveal their nature.
 The bacillus interprets the sun, and only in life
 Can death define its purpose.

The sea
 Creeps up the sand and sandstone like a moss;
 The crest of the rocks is cracked like a breaking wave.
 The land declines again to its old rebirth:—
 Ashes to ashes, sand to sand.

GEORGE SANTAYANA

A CHANGE OF HEART

If a man were a wild spirit without a body or a habitat, his philosophy might harmlessly change at every moment, and he might well pride himself on changing it often and radically, so as to display fertility of spirit and enjoy an inexhaustibly rich experience. Being absolutely free and unfettered by circumstances, why should he stick to any particular principles or ideas and waste his time repeating himself like an idiot or a cuckoo?

It happened in my case, however, that I reached the age of reflection in Avila, a little walled city where old people, old churches, and barren grey moors strewn with prehistoric boulders filled my mind from the first with a sense of antiquity. Nor did reflection later, in the New World, lead me seriously to think myself, or anyone else, a disembodied spirit. On the contrary, it seemed to me evident that no discoverable mind can ever have existed except in a body, so that by the presence and action of that body it might give signs and leave memorials of its passage. Then the past might be partly recalled on occasion, not as a vain dream, but as an experience and a lesson still applicable to a moderately stable world. Moreover, this stable world might contain other living bodies, similar to one's own; and their action and gestures, by mimicry, might instantly suggest to us desires and intentions animating those creatures, and rendering them sympathetic or hostile to ourselves; and so a moral world, practical and social, would become, for our imagination, the theatre of our action, and a roughly valid representation of the forces actually playing upon us and determining the weal and woe of our lives.

On the other hand, the true romantic genius who today cries to the West Wind 'Be thou me, impetuous one!' will cry no less exultantly tomorrow to become the East Wind for a change, although in infinite vacancy it might be hard to find the difference. A truly free spirit will never repent; he cannot revert to his true self, since he has no particular self to revert to. He must simply go on, as transcendental spirit actually does, from one fresh incarnation to another, in and out forever of every living thing. He must will everything, do everything, and suffer everything, but

he can never die: at least he can never prevent himself from being born again. He must lust forever after the Eternal Feminine, or to put it more crudely, after the female of every species.

As for me, not only my body but my rather special and difficult relations to persons and places seemed clearly imposed facts; and in that setting my personal tastes and feelings became early apparent, and caused me to feel that I lived in a kind of solitude, not transcendental and spiritual, but decidedly solitariness in a crowd and foreignness among very distinct people. My preferences were clearly marked and out of harmony with my surroundings and, as I soon felt, with my times. But conceit, or firmness of disposition, kept me from suspecting that I ought to change my allegiances, and think and feel, play and work, as did the majority. Nor did I feel any impulse to contradict them or blame them. I had nothing to complain of, but I preferred solitude.

There was therefore no occasion for me to suffer moral revolutions or undergo any radical change of heart. My interest in religion had never been agonizing, only speculative and devotional. Nothing in me called for any conversion or *metanoia*. Time might transmute, without erasing, my first opinions and affections; might wish to change my surroundings and my way of living; never undertook to change myself. I regard my occupations and interests somewhat as an actor regards his various parts or a painter his subjects. That a man has preferences, and can understand and do one thing better than another, follows from his inevitable limitations and definite gifts; but that which marks progress in his life is the purity of his art; I mean, the degree to which his art has become his life, so that the rest of his nature does not impede or corrupt his art, but only feeds it.

II

Now in my mental life there have been two great impediments, two congenital vices, two initial temptations: the temptation of the primitive poet to believe his fables, and the temptation of the spontaneous agent to lose himself in his world. The primitive poet falls into the first temptation inevitably; his inspiration is passive and not an art; he lends credence to his obsessions and to a higher kind of knowledge, and proclaims each new intuition to be a revelation of the truth. The Jews, says Spinoza, whenever they think something, say God told them. Prophets

indeed do this explicitly and with full conviction, opposing their sudden intuitions to the current views of mankind. They are even more credulous and absorbed in life than ordinary people, only in some extraordinary direction. Yet, unlike madmen, good prophets proclaim new ideas that the world can be led to take seriously and to weave into its conventions, at least for a time and in some sect; whence all traditional religions and moralities.

I am naturally incredulous and not a willing dupe of life in the world or in my own head; yet my imagination is not inactive. I am therefore a sort of prophet at second hand, appreciating the inspiration of others and enjoying it as my own; and for that reason the temptation to mistake it for revelation was in my case never invincible. My youthful piety was accompanied by an equal delight in geography and in architecture. I had little real contact with any of these things, but pure delight in the form and idea of them. All that I later clearly denied them was the assent due to matters of common knowledge or history: matters of fact important to get right in action, but not especially interesting to the imagination of a poet.

All her life my sister Susana was a little troubled because, as she said, she feared that I was 'moving away from God'. Yet at heart I was not *moving* at all. I was only *seeing* what a catastrophe the Christian *Weltanschauung* was pregnant with, if you took it for history and cosmology, and not for a symbolic myth. And this intellectual catastrophe would also involve a moral one, in that it implied the exhaustion of an inspiration, the decay of a *Kultur*. It would be comparable to the catastrophe of paganism and of the classic world, tragic but interesting. The idea of such a catastrophe caused no revolution in myself: it was more like a bereavement or a total change of surroundings. I had never *practised* my religion, or thought of it as a means of getting to heaven or avoiding hell, things that never caused me the least flutter. All that happened was that I became accustomed to a different *Weltanschauung*, to another system having the same rational function as religion: that of keeping me attentive to the lessons of life.

Each religion, by the help of more or less myth which it takes more or less seriously, proposes some method of fortifying the human soul and enabling it to make its peace with its destiny. A philosopher may perfectly well cultivate more than one *Weltanschauung*, if he has a vital philosophy of his own to qualify his

adoption of each, so as to render them complementary and not contradictory. I had, and have, such a vital philosophy; and the movement of my mind among various systems of belief has tended merely to discover how far my vital philosophy could be expressed in each of them.

My variations therefore never involved rejecting any old affection, but only correcting such absoluteness or innocence as there may have been about it, and reducing it to its legitimate function. So in 1900 I published the result of the gradual transformation of my religious sentiments. Religion was poetry intervening in life. That insight had come to me twenty years before, though not expressed in those words; it had really been native to me and congenital. So when I first went to Germany and began to read Goethe, chiefly as a lesson in the language, my vital philosophy recognized itself at once in the lines:

*Ich hab' mein Sach auf nichts gestellt. . . .
Drum ist's so wohl mir in der Welt.*

This is perhaps more cavalier-like and jaunty than I was, even at that time; yet the title of this drinking song is *Vanitas! Vanitas!* and the stanzas describe a gay fellow's discomfiture when he set his heart on money or women or foreign travel or reputation or war; so that when he repeats at the end:

*Nun hab' ich mein Sach auf nichts gestellt. . . .
Und mein gehört die ganze Welt,*

there is evidently an equivocation in his boast. The whole world belongs to me implicitly when I have given it all up, and am wedded to nothing particular in it; but for the same reason no part of it properly belongs to me as a possession, but all only in idea. Materially I might be the most insignificant of worms; spiritually I should be the spectator of all time and all existence.

This implication touched the depth of my vital or congenital philosophy, and for that reason doubtless the refrain of this song became a sort of motto for me at that time. Yet more than ten years had to pass before that implication, on the emotional side, came to expression in my Platonizing sonnets; while theoretically I came to clearness about it only in my old age, when I freed 'essences' from the psychological net in which we catch them, and distinguished intuition from knowledge.

III

Clearer to me in those student days was another point. Goethe's old soldier urges, if we want to be good fellows, that we drown our disappointments in drink. But isn't drink also disappointing in the end? And if it be a solution to drink, in order to forget the vanity of life and incidentally the vanity of drinking, wouldn't it be a better and juster solution to live in general as the world lives, so as to forget the vanity of doing so? Didn't all my American friends endeavour, with a good conscience, to drown unhappiness in work? Wasn't there some intoxication also in wealth, in women, in travel, in fame, and in war? And if drink and comradeship have a good side, which makes them jolly even if vain, have not all those other vanities their good side also? To abuse them satirically, out of spite, because you had expected too much of them, would be merely childish or, if you like, romantic. It would prove you to be moody, ill-bred, and unphilosophical.

Being a philosopher, I could not accept a solution not based on the truth. If all is vanity—and I heartily agree to that—the solution must be built on remembering that fact, not on forgetting it; and if drinking and comradeship have a good side—and I heartily agree to that too—the solution must recognize the good side of drink, and also of wealth, women, travel, fame and war. Not being an old campaigner with one leg, like Goethe's soldier, but a young man just beginning to see the sunny side of life, it was more the challenge to drink that appealed to me than the chagrin at having found that drinking didn't pay. I knew that it wouldn't pay, if you gave yourself up to it; I felt no temptation to do that; but without setting my heart on anything the point was to enjoy everything with a free mind.

This was a pretty programme, easy for a boy to draw up; and my antecedent pessimism and religiosity lent a certain reality to the pose. It lay in my nature to foresee disappointment, and never to bet on the issue of any event. Yet without experience of the world, this programmatic distrust remained itself empty and insecure. Genuine detachment presupposes attachment. What can it signify for you to say that you renounce everything, if as yet you have loved nothing? I have been childishly absorbed in religious ideas, and it was a true though bloodless sacrifice for me to wash them clean of all pretensions to historical or material truth;

yet I was able to do so when quite young, readily and even gladly because when I learned to conceive those myths as poetry, their meaning and beauty, far from being lost, seemed to me clearer and more profound than ever.

The problem was not so easily solved when it came to exorcizing the world and freeing myself from all illusions about it. The world is not a myth, to be clarified by a little literary criticism. It envelops our substance with a kindred substance immensely more voluminous; it stimulates and feeds from every quarter the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eye, and the pride of life. What can the poor rushlight of spirit, kindled in the midst, do to clarify them? The aspiration and the desire must be accepted for the performance.

That nevertheless, as a sentiment, my eventual *metanoia* was sincere may be seen in the slow change that appeared in my way of living. Old age contributed to it; on the other hand, I had larger means and easier access to the great world, had I been in love with it. But I have ultimately become a sort of hermit, not from fear or horror of mankind, but by sheer preference for peace and obscurity. Fortune has become indifferent to me, except as fortune might allow me to despise fortune and to live simply in some beautiful place. I have cut off all artificial society, reducing it to the limits of sincere friendship or intellectual sympathy. Instead of collecting pictures and books, as I had a tendency to do in the early 1890s, I have distributed my few possessions, eschewed chattels of every kind, a fixed residence, servants, carriages, or anything that would pin me down materially or engulf me in engagements.

I have indulged rather freely at certain times in good food and good drink; but I think the glamour of those pleasures was due almost entirely to conviviality—that is to say, to a momentary imitation of friendship. In themselves, when I was alone, food and drink were never important to me. I was almost happier when I could be frugal, as at my father's at Avila, in the Duval restaurants in Paris, in the teashops in London, or now in the clinic of the Blue Sisters upon the Caelius. I am happy in solitude and confinement, and the furious factions into which the world is divided inspire hatred for none of them in my heart.

It should be normal, at least according to the ancients, for a philosopher to reach this moral settlement in old age; but why

did the idea of it and the need of it come upon me powerfully at the age of thirty? There were various reasons. For a poet and a lover of youth the age of thirty is itself a ground for *metanoia*. Being a teacher had been forced upon me by the necessity of somehow earning my living; but being a student was my vocation, and I had been living among students, interesting myself in their sports and their pleasures, and loving their quick and unprejudiced minds. Still this second vicarious adolescence had a rift in it: my sympathy with the young and theirs with me had limits that were growing narrower and sharper. My young friends seemed to me every year younger and younger, more and more standardized and generic. They would no longer be my friends, but only boys at the school where I happened to be one of the masters. That chapter then had come to an end: yet youth, in the world and in the poet's eyes, is perpetual. The Platonic transition was therefore at once spontaneous and inevitable, from the many to the one, from the existent but transitory to the ideal and eternal.

IV

Eventually four thoughts merged their currents and carried me irresistibly towards the same sea: youth was past, friendship had had its day, the future offered me nothing that I cared for, religion and social utopias proposed nothing that I respected. I was driven from the temporal to the eternal, not by any one crisis or conjunction of events, but by the very nature of existence, when this had been honestly faced and frankly admitted. The cry of Ecclesiastes, *Vanitas vanitatum*, could be re-echoed, and the motto from Goethe about setting my heart on nothing could be retained; but both in a new spirit. At twenty my empty spleen could make a clean sweep of the world beforehand, because nothing in it would last forever; it didn't occur to me to ask whether lasting forever would improve anything that was worthless while it lasted.

But ten years later I had travelled. I had learned something of the pleasures and manners of mankind, and for myself I had made some progress in the primrose path of Epicurean wisdom. I had now forever in my fancy a lovely picture of ancient Greece and a lovely picture of modern England; and having begun by fully admitting that all was vanity, I could not be angry with the

primroses for fading or with the path for being short. I accepted them as vain but beautiful, transitory but perfect; and I was no less ready to give them up than to enjoy them. To give them up I mean, as possessions, as enjoyments, as private hopes; I would never give them up as allegiances. Never should I esteem and love them the less because they happened to pass out of my orbit.

In another field, not so strictly personal, I was compelled to accept a rather difficult renunciation. I was a teacher of philosophy in the place where philosophy was most modern, most deeply Protestant, most hopefully new—the very things from which, in speculation, my *metanoia* turned me away. I could never be, I will not say a leader, but even a happy participator in the intellectual faith of my neighbours. Not that I had any hostility to that faith: it was as natural in its place and time as any other, and contained important elements of truth; but it could never be my faith. In the midst of the living, I could live only with the dead. It was a comfort, but a cold comfort, to say that I was living among the immortals.

Reacting now against all these closed doors, I found the morality of Goethe's drinking song cheap and hollow. His old soldier *dishonours* his past, as if his present cynicism and rowdiness could be something better. This is only one more mood, one more incident, and a more vulgar one because there is less courage in it. There was vitality in those human adventures; there is also wit and good humour in laughing now at their seamy side; but it is dishonourable and self-contradictory to forswear your honest loves, past or present. They it is that reveal your true nature and its possible fulfilments; they are the Good, in the modes of it that you can appreciate and unfeignedly worship. There is therefore enthusiasm no less than resignation in an enlightened *metanoia*. You give up everything in the form of claims; you receive everything back in the form of a divine presence.

This final settlement of the moral problem involved no visible change in my mode of living. I went on teaching and writing, drinking and travelling and making friends; only that now, beforehand and explicitly, these occupations were marked for me with a cross: the sign on the one hand of death and on the other of consecration. Gradual and bloodless as the change was, there was a wrench in it, a passage through dark night. I had become aware that, as a spirit, I was not myself but pure spirit, to whom

all selves are mere objects, and all their joys and sufferings so many animal vapours, to be endured courageously and no less courageously dismissed and wiped away. The truth of life could be seen only in the shadow of death; living and dying were simultaneous and inseparable. For, as Emerson has it:

This losing is true dying,
This is lordly man's down-lying,
This his true and sure declining,
Star by star his world resigning.

Yet this transit through darkness brought me quickly back onto the light, into the pure starlight that transports without dazzling. No part of time is lost in eternity, only the haste and uncertainty of passing from one thing to another. I had not been ravaged by any hostile fate; my heart had simply uttered a warning against its own weakness. It had said to me: Cultivate imagination, love it, give it endless forms, but do not let it deceive you. Enjoy the world, travel over it, and learn its ways, but do not let it hold you. Do not suffer it to oppress you with craving or with regret for the images that you may form of it. You will do the least harm and find the greatest satisfactions if, being furnished lightly as possible with possessions, you live freely among ideas. To possess things and persons in idea is the only pure good to be got out of them; to possess them physically or legally is a burden and a snare.

V

I know very well that this philosophic salvation is not such as nature or life looks for or can accept: it is only what the truth affords to the spirit. Life and nature do not ask to be saved from themselves: they ask only to run on at full tilt. It is the spirit that asks to be saved from that insane predicament. Yet spirit is an emanation of life, and it is more truly and naturally happy in the first phases of its career than in its final salvation. In the end, when it has understood and renounced everything, if you ask it whether it is happy, it can reply only as La Vallière replied to the friends who asked her if she were happy in the Carmelite convent to which she had retired: *Je ne suis pas heureuse; je suis contente.* Nature had been muted, but spirit had been freed. In that sense, and under the spell of that profound conviction, I composed the

second sequence of my sonnets, using the traditional language and images of love which can render that sentiment best. They belong to a second-rate kind of poetry that in itself has no claim to attention; but here, considered as autobiography, they may be recalled. The key to the whole is given in the one line:

A perfect love is founded on despair.

This paradox is condensed and rhetorical; to get at the truth in it we must expand it a little and ward off certain misunderstandings. It is not love simply, but only *perfect* love, that includes despair. Love in itself includes hope, or at least a desire to preserve the object of it, to enshrine and defend it. And in regard to the object even perfect love retains this solicitude. It is only in regard to the lover, as a poor human being, that hope must be cut off, plucked up by the roots, if love is ever to become pure, happy, and immortal. The perfect lover must renounce pursuit and the hope of possession. His person and life must, in his own eyes, fall altogether out of the picture. Stendhal, in his book *l'Amour* (which unlike his others pleases me very much), distinguishes four kinds of love, *l'amour physique*, *l'amour vanité*, *l'amour gout*, and *la grande passion*. The first two are obviously imperfect and impure: they include craving, jealousy, cruelty, fear, folly, and self-degradation. Yet the vital side of physical love cannot be dispensed with, since it is the root of the whole growth and motion intense in the *grande passion*. In the great passion this vital impulse is often diverted from physical lust and jealousy to absolute devotion, heroism, and suicide. It is therefore psychologically not only possible but normal for the passion of love to be self-forgetting and to live on in the very act of sacrifice and personal despair. So transformed, the great passion becomes worship. And the *amour gout*, which is more playful, and turns the vital element into laughter and delight, also reaches perfection only when all thoughts of the self, all *amour vanité*, drop out of it and it becomes wholly aesthetic, pure joy in beauty and charm. Combine these two elements, the tragic and the lyrical, and you have turned love into rapture in adoration which seems to me its perfection. It presupposes the total abdication of physical, social, or egotistic claims; yet these claims were instinctive in the psyche, and the spirit has either adopted them and repented, or at least felt affronted by them in refusing to make them. The passion of love

iblimated, does not become bloodless, or free from bodily trepitation, as charity and philanthropy are. It is essentially the spiritual flame of a carnal fire that has turned all its fuel into light. The psyche is not thereby atrophied; on the contrary, the range of its reactions has been enlarged. It has learned to vibrate harmoniously to many things at once in a peace which is an orchestration of transcended sorrows.

R. J. MANNING THE FOX

HE girl looked ahead at the long track of Roman road boldly circling the curves of the hill, and wondered whether the legions marching out of Dorchester to the west of England were as moved by the line of the coast as she was—at Swyre and Shipton and the burning face of Golden Cap. Geoffrey, who knew the country well ('born and bred in these parts', he was fond of saying) looked over the landscape about him, too, but not with wonder and absorption, like the girl, rather with a restless, searching gaze, to detect out some point of interest, some associative peg on which he could hang a remark. He found it in the clouds. To the left of the walkers, under the pellucid Channel sky, lay the coast, a dull pale smudge of sea visible from time to time through gaps in the hills. To their right the countryside lay piled in folds, a quilted landscape, many-coloured. Above the greens and browns of the fields moved plump white clouds, apparently very near at hand, deeply curled and bubbled like lather. Geoffrey waved his stick at them. 'Painter's clouds,' he said, breaking the silence with stern relief in his voice. Odd how Geoffrey, who knew so little about painting, loved to refer to it, even to embellish his speech with its jargon, as though it were his hobby if not his profession, while the girl, who was a painter herself, never used these terms. 'Painter's clouds,' said Geoffrey again, rather pleased with the remark. 'Might be in one of Mr. Turner's pictures.'

The girl looked at him thoughtfully. That was another trick he had, the prefixing of 'Mr.' to any well-known author's or artist's name. Just a habit, thought the girl. Other men might bite their

nails, or drink. Perhaps it was not such a vice as all that and was unreasonable to be irritated at it. They must have walked miles up that Roman road, dead straight all the way, a chalk track with grass growing down the centre of it, a track one could walk ahead of one, as though it were a rope inexorably drawing one after it. Her eyes had been focussed on the distant landmarks, on the embanked rim of Eggardun to which the road was leading, and on the lonely uplands to the left and right of her, hills to which she could give no name and which her absorbed gaze had brought so near to her that it seemed she only needed to reach out her hand to stroke their sleeping contours. Geoffrey's remark pulled her consciousness back to her immediate surroundings. She looked at her companion. He was very pleasant to look at. He had been very pleasant to sleep with for the last fortnight. Now it was over. Tonight she was going back to her studio, and he was returning to his parents' house in Streatham. It was all as clearly mapped out as the chalk track that the Romans had built. The clarity of the sky, the sharp outlines of the coastal hills, the firm Roman track in front of her induced in her mind a similar lucidity. She had a sensation that her mind was detached from her body, that he walked at her side, a kind of eidolon, viewing her and her companion, making it possible for her reason to wash its hands ironically of her physical self and anything it chose to do. She knew now that she did not want to see Geoffrey again. Watching his attractive form pacing beside her she admitted, ruefully, that it would be a sacrifice to give him up. That is how she viewed it. As a sacrifice, a denial, for her own good and peace of mind. Painters are usually logical like this. Geoffrey had no idea of the ruthless logic of the artist. He imagined, like many people, that the nature of the artist is in essence emotional (he did not care for the word 'passionate') and that they were incapable of clear reasoning or balanced judgement. He thought the word 'temperamental' a very useful one.

His remark irritated her. Walking in silence up the chalk track to the encampment of Eggardun, she had mapped out her plans for the day with precision, just as she would have laid out on her palette the colours she wanted to use. She intended, when they reached the hill fortress, to enjoy a last hour of love-making before they had to turn their eyes eastward, and start the journey back to their different London worlds. The future she had intended

leave to take care of itself. His remark recalled to her all the irritation and boredom at his triviality which she so often experienced in the evenings he spent at her studio. For a moment he felt inclined to strike him, to surprise out of his face that intented appraising look. The strong sweet air on the hill top fed like a draught of water to slake a dirty taste from the mouth. Her reason still walking coolly at her shoulder, she gave herself up with exhilaration to the thrust of the wind, blowing so strongly now that it made it difficult to draw breath, and so sharpened her senses that the scrape of a grass against her bare leg, the sudden pressure of a gust of air against her breast, aroused a measurable response throughout her body, like a caress. She took her left hand in Geoffrey's right, yet even as she deliberately vowed her senses to awaken to his presence, she felt no sentiment that would have induced her to change the decision which his remark had aroused her to take. She had no desire to share her life with him. The perpetual battle to resist his appropriation of herself and her belongings exhausted her. He expected the physical possession of her body (which, to do him justice, he carried out with the greatest technical skill, in such a manner as to make her believe that she was the possessor rather than himself), expected this to extend to every other aspect of her life, and opted very much the same tactics. 'Painter's clouds,' he called them, and thus he appropriated their soft contours, their plump whiteness, and yet the very use of the word 'painter's' transferred them to the girl, arbitrarily giving them into her possession, so that she must accept them as 'her' clouds, whether she wanted them or not, and share them with him because they were his discovery and gift.

She decided not to answer his remark in any way. The folded fan of Eggardon was in sight, the chalk track sidling past the lower bank of the fortress.

'What do you think, darling?' said Geoffrey, firmly. 'Doesn't remind you of one of Mr. Turner's efforts?'

'Efforts' was a favourite word of his. 'That's a good effort,' he could say, inspecting her latest painting.

'Geoffrey,' she said, 'will you be coming over to the studio again when we get back to London?'

He looked at her, startled.

'Why, of course, sweetheart. What do you expect?'

'I just wondered.'

'You want me to come, don't you?'

'Honestly, no. I don't think I do. You see, it's my studio. It's where I work. I don't really like anyone else in it.'

Geoffrey walked for some yards in silence. He was marshalling his mental forces to meet this direct attack. He had released his hand. His arms were locked behind him.

'I like honesty,' he said at last. 'Will you go on being honest and tell me exactly what you mean. After all, I have been coming to your studio a good deal in the last few months and I don't remember your saying anything like this before.'

'No, I didn't,' rejoined the girl.

'Well?' he said, and she looked away from him so that she could not see his face working uneasily, as he sought for the right road in his mind, the correct turning to take. She kept her eyes on the chalk track and thanked the Romans for their direct methods.

'Geoffrey, you're a darling. I've loved this whole fortnight with you, but I—I suppose I'm a very selfish person, and I don't want to share my studio with anyone, not even you.'

'I see.'

'It's very difficult to say this, you know, especially up here where it's so unbelievably lovely.'

'I'm sure it is.'

'I don't want to hurt you.'

'You don't. It's you I love, not your studio.'

'Yes, but if we don't meet there, where are we to meet? Streatham is out of the question, and I refuse any hole-and-corner business in London hotels. There's the country, of course; I suppose we could go away for week-ends together.'

'You are being so logical,' said Geoffrey in a voice he was endeavouring to make sound natural, but which was, in fact, strained and tight in his throat. 'You are being so logical, like this damn Roman road. You do not want me in your studio; you cannot come to my home because you are married; you despise hotels. It is so simple, isn't it?'

'I think it is.'

'Do you see the rings of the fort? That's Eggardon.'

'I know.' He was shifting his ground, surely? Like a wrestler his feet were scuffling the earth for a firm foothold while his mind rapidly thought out the next hold.

'I want to make love to you, up there in the Celtic encampment. Let's forget the studio and the Roman simplicity of your gic.' No, this was not what she had intended. He had taken command of the situation. He was playing on the feelings which could most easily count on to give him the advantage.

'There's a terrible poetry in leaving the Romans to their logic and indulging in a little Celtic—' his voice faltered as his usual bit of thought reasserted itself over the daring *ad hoc* strategy which he had adopted—'a little Celtic passion for the last time, isn't there?'

'Perhaps there is.'

'The sort of poetry my revered Mr. Hardy would have appreciated, I think.'

The girl felt empty and tired. She stumbled over the grass rut through the centre of the track, and caught Geoffrey's arm. He locked his fingers in hers and they walked on towards the great banks of the encampment. The conical top of the fort stood out against the sky, and it seemed that the end of the world might be beyond. Three hawks tumbled and soared, hovered and swooped over every now and again disappearing over its rim into the deep hole that lay on the other side of the hill. For one moment all three quivered, trembling against a cerulean backcloth.

'Pinnacled high in the intense inane,' quoted Geoffrey, pausing to watch them. 'I remember some of Mr. Shelley still,' he examined carefully, 'though I think he's a poet for schoolboys.'

He waited for her to disagree or comment upon this *mot*, but she remained obstinately silent. He liked to lead up to his lovemaking with a little conversation. It was all going according to plan—his plan, not hers, thought the girl bitterly.

'People talk a lot of nonsense about the way poetry is ruined by children by the teaching they have to endure at school. I treasure the poetry I learned then. It has remained with me, like a treasure house into which I can dip when I want to.'

'Yes?' said the girl dutifully, her hand deliberately unresponsive to his, and her mind detached.

'Yes?' she said, and did not listen to his voice, for Golden Cap, up in the sun, had caught her eyes, like the flash of a window many miles away. All the coloured landscape was dominated by that single gleam of gold, above the opaque blue of the sea.

Why had she ever consented to this holiday? Geoffrey had

irritated her before, in the interminable evenings in the studio when he talked and quoted and strewed his opinions about other men strew cigarette ash. He had not irritated her enough. That was it. He had never been with her for long at a time. He departed for Streatham and the studio became hers again. Now during the fortnight she had spent in his company, she had seen the pervasive quality of his love not as the warmth of a fire, but as the frightening upsurge of waters which threatened to submerge her utterly. Every aspect of it now appeared to her as a weapon in the armoury of his will. She recalled the evenings at the studio, his courteous yet unhesitating insistence on the removal of her paints from the table, *his* table as long as he was in the room; the bottle of beer produced from the pocket ('Does us both good, sweetheart,' was his inevitable remark, and he good-naturedly finished off her glass for her when she protested that she did not really care for it). She recalled something else about him, something for which she had loved him, and she compared him sharply in her mind with her husband, whom she seldom saw and whom she disliked. George had been impressively masculine. For him, bed was something to which you steered a young woman without too much finesse, too much beating about the bush.

'God bless my soul,' he would say, when the bed had served its purpose, 'what sensualists you women are!' When he had said this for the fiftieth time, she decided that she must be unnatural, frigid, refused to sleep with him and went to see a doctor. After that he said it to her models, so she abandoned her old studio and him and departed to another, to live a celibate and extremely happy life, till Geoffrey appeared in it. Geoffrey's tactics were quite different and much pleasanter. How subtly he had penetrated her life, and fastened upon the core of it like a maggot, did not become apparent to her until she had spent this fortnight with him. When Geoffrey came to the studio, he would take off his shoes and stretch himself upon her divan.

'Darling, how tired I am, and how comfortable it is here. D'you mind?'

She sat beside him, and he kissed her drowsily, without desire. She had looked then at his recumbent body, and asked herself, 'Was George right? Am I a sensualist? Are the copy books wrong? When a man climbs on to your bed, does he really only want to go to sleep?'

It seemed so where Geoffrey was concerned, so that when they became lovers, the initiative was made to appear hers. So much had he invaded her room that the bed was more his than hers and she the intruder and stranger between its sheets. Here, on Eggardun, she was still an intruder. It was his country. He had brought her here. She was the visitor being shown round, although, in fact, she had known this hill fortress for years. In his desire to make love to her in the curved folds of the encampment, he was acting in his usual character. George would have propelled her into the soft grassy bed of the fosse, behaved like a cave man and then told her what a whore she was, dragging a man down to the level of a savage. Geoffrey would make love far more tenderly, far more expertly, and she would be deceived again into imagining that they had found in their union something greater than themselves, a third soul, as it were, an entity which was Geoffrey-and-herself.

But Geoffrey regarded Eggardun as his own, and if he now wanted her, it was in part to divert her from her decision not to see him again, and, still more, it was from force of habit, to satisfy his need to add to his possessions, to build up for himself a wall of belongings as strong as the double fosses and banks, within which he could comment comfortably upon painter's clouds, and quote Mr. Shelley, and proclaim himself the slave of natural beauty, whether seen in the fleecy toy clouds, the green contours of the uplands, or her breasts which he had compared so poetically with the neighbouring twin hills of Lewesdon and Pilsdon Pen.

Yet, looking at his sunburnt, handsome face, she felt him to be unreasonably dear to her. Though she had fortified herself with the direct strength of the Roman road, as others might fortify themselves with a glass of whisky, in her determination not to see him again, she found herself reaching for his hand again, pressing her fingers into his palm. George must have been right. She could have laughed out loud, but for the tears of frustration which were perilously near her eyes. She pulled him angrily towards her, and pressed his mouth to hers.

'Geoffrey,' she muttered, 'Geoffrey, Geoffrey, why aren't you more of a barbarian?'

She pulled away from him, and for a moment they stood watching each other warily. They knew each other so little that each move in the game was a major manœuvre for the position

of advantage. A whine, a throttled half-human cry broke the tension, and they looked about them, helplessly. The whine came again, and the rattle and thud of a chain. Passion had ebbed leaving them empty, bored, a little embarrassed. Thankfully, they seized upon the diversion. The whining came from a group of bushes at the edge of the lane, elders, and thorns, all of them stunted, twisted and toughened with the winds that swept over the bare hill top. Geoffrey's coat was open, and he was still clasping the girl's hand against his grey shirt. She could feel his heart-beats slow down and the breath in his chest quieten as he listened.

'What the devil is it?' he said at last. He dropped her hand and walked over to the bushes.

'It's a fox,' he called. 'Do come. It's a young fox in a trap.'

At the sight of a man the fox's whines changed to a shrill yapping. It plunged about in the brambles, its eyes wide with terror, opaque with pain. Geoffrey put his foot on the chain of the trap, and reached out his hand to take the fox by the scruff, but it bared its teeth, and he jumped back. The fox began to cry hysterically, slavering foam from its jaws. Geoffrey took off his jacket and tossed it to the girl.

'See if you can get this over its head,' he ordered, 'and hold it down.'

After a few attempts the girl succeeded in enveloping the young fox in the jacket. It lay quite still, her hands firmly grasping its shoulders and neck, while Geoffrey fingered the clumsy trap. It took him several moments to open it, but at last he succeeded in pressing it back and releasing the paw. The skin was torn off it and the bone showed through, splintered like firewood. The fox lay quite still, its sides heaving, its brown coat dusty and staring. Gently Geoffrey lifted the coat from its head. It snarled. Its eyes red-rimmed and full of fear, gazed up at them unblinking. Geoffrey rubbed it behind the ears and ruffled the golden nap of its neck. But they were the enemy. They let it go. It snapped at them, and bolted away, limping through the bracken to the edge of the road, where it plunged into the thick undergrowth. Geoffrey wrenched up the bloodstained trap, with the little rag of skin and fur still adhering to its teeth. He hesitated a moment. Private property was sacred. Then he flung it far into the brambles.

The girl watched him, observing, with the accuracy to which

she had trained herself, the easy grace of his movement, like a disc-thrower's. Geoffrey picked up his jacket.

'The lining is stained with blood,' he said. He held it up and gazed thoughtfully at the dark stains.

'It will be a kind of souvenir, won't it?'

'Of what?' asked the girl softly. He did not reply for a moment. The wind whined through the thorns where the little fox had lunged and yapped, and sent a penetrating current of scent across to them, as they walked further down the road towards the encampment.

'One is on top of the world here,' said Geoffrey.

'A souvenir of what, though?' reiterated the girl. She clung to his arm. The wind seemed very cold now that they were coming out on top of the hill.

He began to laugh softly. 'Of release,' he said. The girl looked at him puzzled for a moment. Then she picked up the threads of the game deftly, where it had been left off. She reached up her face to his and kissed him, not too warmly this time.

'What a dear you are,' she said. 'I wish I wanted to live with you permanently. But it's better to be honest. You aren't too hurt, are you? It's been so lovely here this fortnight. You've been a sweet lover, but love-making isn't everything. You'd know that if you'd ever been married. We shouldn't hit it off together, not for long. You'd irritate me, and—well, I suppose I would irritate you. I'm everything you're not.'

'What am I?' he asked quickly.

'Oh, well,' she hedged. 'Well, you're the sweetest person to sleep with, anyway.'

He turned and faced her. 'You know,' he said thoughtfully, 'you said that before.'

'I mean it.'

'You must have a lot of experience. I suppose that's what comes of being an artist.'

How old-fashioned Geoffrey was. She had lived an absolutely celibate life since her marriage. Yet there was something in what Geoffrey said. People expected artists to live irregular lives. It might be worth trying, if only it did not interfere with one's work too much. Geoffrey was sticking doggedly to his point.

'Isn't that it?'

'No, of course it isn't. I am not at all promiscuous.'

'Still, you harp on it rather. I assume, therefore, that you must be more experienced than I am. You know how to snap up the meat without getting your feet in the trap.'

'What an extraordinary thing to say, Geoffrey. It isn't a question of traps, or—or meat.'

'I think it is. I have been a juicy morsel which you have swallowed whole and much enjoyed.'

'Oh, nonsense, Geoffrey. Pull yourself together. I don't know what you're talking about. You bore me.'

'Not in bed, I don't,' he persisted.

The girl fell silent. The new turn in the conversation nonplussed her. She had had it all so well planned—the final moment of passion here on the rim of the world, in the place where thousands of years ago men built a wall to keep out fear, a place where the cool, detached sky was close to the ardent earth, and it was possible to feel passionately and think clearly at the same time, one's feet firmly planted on the wiry turf and one's nostrils and lungs filled with the intoxicating, wine-sweet air. Thus she had planned after the passion, the reasonable talk. This was good-bye for good. It was better to be frank. She thought bitterly that her plan had miscarried. She had allowed herself to be irritated into telling him that she did not want to see him again, too early in the proceeding of the day. But that was not so damnable a setback in her plan as the episode of the fox. In this Geoffrey had issued the commands, had done all the thinking and performed most of the essential action. He did not now seem to have lost the initiative. She realized suddenly that he was still talking.

'So I threw the trap away,' he said, 'but the symbol of my release is on my jacket. If it had not been for the fox you would have corrupted me utterly. Let me describe to you the trap you had set. I wasn't to be admitted to your studio, because I am bore intellectually, and because your clever friends think I am commonplace. But you don't really want to lose me. You won't come to my house, and you despise a cheap hotel, so I am not sure just where my bondage was to be sealed and your tyranny enjoyed.'

'Geoffrey, darling,' said the girl coolly, 'you're being a fool.'

'That,' he said, 'is a cliché. You cannot think of anything better to say. It's damn funny, because you say I talk in clichés.' They walked for a few moments in silence. Then the girl left his side and ran on ahead of him. Her feet ran lightly over the springy

turf, and an exhilaration, a rapid pulsing of her blood, made her laugh suddenly, as she flung herself down on the ancient turf. She rolled over on it like a young animal. Geoffrey was standing where she had left him. Suddenly he spoke and his voice rose to shout and thundered over the silent green face of the encampment, vanishing over the rim into the empty air of the vale.

'By God,' he bellowed, 'if you want to share my bed, you must share my clichés as well, and damn well be bored. Bed and bored!' He gave a shout of laughter. 'Bed and bored! Bed and bored!' His voice died away as, swinging the bloodstained jacket, he stumbled, half-running, down the long Roman road away from her. She watched him, her throat dry with anger and humiliation. She felt tears stinging her eyelids and rubbed her fingers across them. She turned and lay face downwards, her strong bony hands pressed against her face. She retched violently. Clinging to her hands was the pungent odour of the fox.

E. M. FORSTER

THE *RAISON D'ÊTRE* OF CRITICISM¹

I

BELIEVING as I do, that music is the deepest of the arts and deepest beneath the arts, I venture to emphasize music in this brief survey of the *raison d'être* of criticism. I have no authority here. I am an amateur whose inadequacy will become all too obvious as he proceeds. Perhaps, though, it may be remembered in charity that the word amateur implies love. I love music. Just to love it, or just to love anything or anybody is not enough. Love has to be clarified and controlled to give full value, and here is where criticism may help. But one has to start with love; one has, in the case of music, to want to hear the notes. If one has no initial desire to listen and no sympathy after listening, the notes will signify nothing, sound and fury, whatever their intellectual content.

The case *against* criticism is alarmingly strong, and much of my survey is bound to be a brief drawn up by the Devil's Advocate.

¹A lecture given in May 1947 at a Symposium of Music at Harvard.

I will postpone the evil day, and begin by indicating the case for criticism.

Most of us will agree, I think, that previous training is desirable before we approach the arts. We mistrust untrained appreciation, believing that it often defeats its own ends. Appreciation ought to be enough. But unless we learn by example and by failure and by comparison, appreciation will not bite. We shall tend to slide about on the surface of masterpieces, exclaiming with joy, but never penetrating. 'Oh, I do like Bach', cries one appreciator, and the other cries, 'Do you? I don't. I like Chopin.' Exit in opposite directions chanting Bach and Chopin respectively, and hearing less the composers than their own voices. They resemble investors who proclaim the soundness of their financial assets. The Bach shares must not fall, the Chopin not fall further, or one would have been proved a fool on the aesthetic stock exchange. The objection to untrained appreciation is not its *naïveté* but its tendency to lead to the appreciation of no one but oneself. Against such fatuity the critical spirit is a valuable corrective.

Except at the actual moment of contact—and I shall have much to say on the subject of that difficult moment—it is desirable to know why we like a work, and to be able to defend our preferences by argument. Our judgement has been strengthened, and if all goes well, the contacts will be intensified and increased and become more valuable.

I add the proviso 'if all goes well' because success lies on the knees of an unknown God. There is always the contrary danger, the danger that training may sterilize the sensitiveness that is being trained; that education may lead to knowledge instead of wisdom; and criticism to nothing but criticism; that spontaneous enjoyment, like the Progress of Poesy in Matthew Arnold's poem, may be checked because too much care has been taken to direct it into the right channel. Still, it is a risk to be faced, and if no care had been taken the stream might have vanished even sooner. We hope criticism will help. We have faith in it as a respectable human activity, as an item in the larger heritage which differentiates us from the beasts.

II

How best can this activity be employed? One must allow it to construct aesthetic theories, though to the irreverent eyes of some of us they appear as travelling laboratories, beds of Procrustes,

whereon Milton is too long and Keats too short. In an age which is respectful to theory—as for instance the seventeenth century was respectful to Aristotle's theory of the dramatic unities—a theory may be helpful and stimulating, particularly to the sense of form. French tragedy could culminate in Racine because certain leading strings had been so willingly accepted that they were scarcely felt. Corneille and Tasso were less happy. Corneille, having produced 'The Cid', wasted much time trying to justify its deviations from Aristotle's rules; and Tasso wasted even more, for he published his theory of Christian Epic Poetry before he wrote the 'Gerusalemme Liberata' which was to illustrate it. His epic was attacked by the critics because it deviated from what Aristotle said and also from what Tasso thought he might have said. Tasso was upset, became involved in three volumes of controversy, which not even Professor Saintsbury has read, tried to write a second epic which should not deviate, failed and went mad. Except in Russia, where the deviations of Shostakovitch invite a parallel, a theory in the modern world has little power over the fine arts, for good or evil. We have no atmosphere where it can flourish, and the attempts of certain governments to generate such an atmosphere in bureaux are unlikely to succeed. The construction of aesthetic theories and their comparison, are desirable cultural exercises: the theories themselves are unlikely to spread far or to hinder or help.

A more practical activity for criticism is the sensitive dissection of particular works of art. What did the artist hope to do? What means did he employ, sub-conscious or conscious? Did he succeed, and if his success was partial where did he fail? In such a dissection the tools should break as soon as they encounter any living tissue. The apparatus is nothing, the specimen all. Whether expert critics will agree with so extreme a statement is doubtful, but I do enjoy following particular examinations so far as an amateur can. It is delightful and profitable to enter into technicalities to the limit of one's poor ability, to continue as far as one can in the wake of an expert mind, to pursue an argument till it passes out of one's grasp. And to have, while this is going on, a particular work of art before one can be a great help. Besides learning about the work one increases one's powers. Criticism's central job seems to be education through precision.

A third activity, less important, remains to be listed, and since

it lies more within my sphere than precision I will discuss it at greater length. Criticism can stimulate. Few of us are sufficiently awake to the beauty and wonder of the world, and when art intervenes to reveal them it sometimes acts in reverse, and lowers a veil instead of raising one. This deadening effect can often be dispersed by a well-chosen word. We can be awakened by a remark which need not be profound or even true, and can be sent scurrying after the beauties and wonders we were ignoring. Journalism and broadcasting have their big opportunity here. Unsuit for synthesis or analysis, they can send out the winged word that carries us off to examine the original.

There is in fact a type of criticism which has no interpretative value, yet it should not be condemned offhand. Much has been written about music, for instance, which has nothing to do with music and must make musicians smile. It usually describes the state into which the hearer was thrown as he sat on his chair at the concert and the visual images which occurred to him in that sedentary position.

Here is an example, and a very lovely one, from Walt Whitman. Whitman has heard 'one of Beethoven's master septets' performed at Philadelphia (there is only one Beethoven septet, but this the old boy did not know), and the rendering of it on a 'small band of well chosen and perfectly combined instruments' carries him away.

Dainty abandon, sometimes as of Nature laughing on a hill-side in the sunshine; serious and firm monotones, as of winds; a horn sounding through the tangle of the forest, and the dying echoes; soothing floating waves, but presently rising in surges, angrily lashing, muttering, heavy; piercing peals of laughter for interstices; now and then weird as Nature is herself in certain moods—but mainly spontaneous, easy, careless—often the sentiment of the postures of naked children playing or sleeping. It did me good even to see the violinists drawing their bows so masterly—every motion a study. I allowed myself, as I sometimes do, to wander out of myself. The conceit came to me of a copious grove of singing birds, and in their midst a simple harmonic duo, two human souls, steadily asserting their own pensiveness, joyousness.

Here is adorable literature, but what has it to do with Op. 20? A poet's imagination has been kindled. He has allowed himself to

wander out of himself, but not into Beethoven's self, his presumable goal. He has evoked the visual images congenial to him, and though in the closing phrase there is a concert it is not the one he attended, for it took place in the garden of Eden.

Another example of such criticism is to be found in Proust. Proust is what Walt Whitman is not—sophisticated, *soigné*, *rusé*, *maladif*. But he, too, listens to a septet and reacts to it visually, he carries off his seat into a region which has nothing to do with the concert. It is the septet of Vinteuil, whom we have hitherto known as the composer of a violin sonata. Vinteuil himself, an obscure and unhappy provincial organist, has scarcely appeared; but his sonata, and particularly a phrase in it, *la petite phrase*, has been an actor in the long-drawn inaction of the novel. Character after character has listened to it, and has felt hope, jealousy, despair, peace, according to the circumstances into which *la petite phrase* has entered. We do not know what it sounds like, but its arrival always means emotional heightening.

Toward the end of the novel, the hero goes to a musical reception in Paris where a new work is to be performed. He does not bother to look at the programme, being occupied by social trifles. It is a septet—the opening bars are sombre, glacial, as if dawn had not yet risen over the sea. He finds himself in an unknown world, where he understands nothing. Suddenly into this bewilderment there falls—*la petite phrase*, a reference to the sonata. He is listening to a posthumous work of Vinteuil, of whose existence he was unaware. Everything falls into shape. It is as if he has walked in an unknown region and come across the little gate which belongs to the garden of a friend. The septet expands its immensities, now comprehensible. The dawn rises crimson out of the sea, harsh midday rejoicings give way to more images, and the little phrase of the sonata, once virginal and shy, is august, quivering with colours, final, mature.

Now these visual wanderings are not entirely to my taste. Whitman's has its own naïve merit, but in the case of Proust, who is pretentious culturally, we feel uneasy.

Shall we then say that they do not and cannot help us musically all? I think this is too severe. The septets of Beethoven and of Vinteuil have come no nearer to us, but we have been excited, we have been disposed to listen to sounds, we have been challenged to test the descriptions and to decide whether we agree

with them. This general sharpening of interest is desirable. It can be effected in various ways: by a legitimate critic like Donald Tovey, by a grand old boy at Philadelphia, or by a snobbish Frenchman in the Faubourg St. Germain. All ways are not equally good. Those who hear music will always interpret it best. But those who don't hear it after the first few notes have also their use. Their wanderings, their visual images, their dreams, help to sharpen us. They recall us to the importance of sounds, and their inferior in other ways, we may perhaps manage to listen to the sounds longer than they did.

Examples of higher musical value are to be found in the early journalism of Bernard Shaw. Though Shaw is a man of letters like Whitman and Proust, and readily runs after his own thoughts and pictorial images, he does manage to remember the music. He can interpret as well as stimulate. He can say for instance of Haydn: 'Haydn would have been among the greatest had he been driven to that terrible eminence; but we are fortunate enough in having had at least one man of genius who was happy enough in the Valley of Humiliation to feel no compulsion to struggle on through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.' What a sensitive and just reflection! How admirably it expresses that turning away from the tragic so often displayed by Haydn—for instance in the opening of the C Major Symphony (Op. 97). He has turned to gaiety not because he is afraid of tragedy, which would discompose the listener, but because he prefers not to be tragic. This is an essential in Haydn, and, apprehending it, Shaw convinces us that he is inside music and could have criticized it more deeply if he had his career and his inclinations allowed.

I like, in this connexion, jokes about music, irresponsible foolery which sometimes kicks a door open as it flies. They, too, may incline us to listen to sounds. When our English humorist, the Beachcomber, says 'Wagner is the Puccini of music', he says rather more than he says. Besides guying a well-worn formula, he pierces Grand Opera itself, and reveals Brünnhilde and the Butterfly transfixed on the same mischievous pin. I like, too, the remark of an uncle of mine, a huntin', fishin', shootin', sportin' sort of uncle, whose aversion to the arts was very genuine. 'They tell me,' he said one day thoughtfully, 'they tell me music's like a gun, it hurts less when you let it off yourself.' Besides getting in a well-directed gibe, and discomposing my aunt who adored

Mendelssohn, he indicated very neatly the gulf between artist on the one hand and critic on the other. Those who are involved and those who appraise are never hurt in the same way. This is, as a matter of fact, going to be our chief problem here, and perhaps it will come the fresher because my uncle hit at it in his slapdash fashion before striding back to his dogs.

III

For now our trouble starts. We can readily agree that criticism has educational and cultural value; the critic helps to civilize the community, builds up standards, forms theories, stimulates, dissects, encourages the individual to enjoy the world into which he has been born; and on its destructive side, he exposes fraud and pretentiousness and checks conceit. These are substantial achievements. But I would like if I could to establish the *raison d'être* of criticism on a higher basis than that of public utility. I would like to discover some spiritual parity between it and the objects it criticizes, and this is going to be difficult. The difficulty has been variously expressed. One writer—Mr. F. L. Lucas—has called criticism a charming parasite; another—Chekhov—complains it is a gadfly which hinders the oxen from ploughing; a third—Lord Kames—compares it to an imp which distracts critics from their objective and incites them to criticize each other. My own trouble is not so much that it is a parasite, a gadfly, or an imp, but that there is a basic difference between the critical and creative states of mind, and to the consideration of that difference I would now invite your attention.

What about the creative state? In it a man is taken out of himself. He lets down as it were a bucket into his subconscious, and draws up something which is normally beyond his reach. He mixes this thing with his normal experiences, and out of the mixture he makes a work of art. It may be a good work of art or bad one—we are not here examining the question of quality—but whether it is good or bad it will have been compounded in this unusual way, and he will wonder afterwards how he did it. Such seems to be the creative process. It may employ much technical ingenuity and worldly knowledge, it may profit by critical standards, but mixed up with it is this stuff from the bucket, this subconscious stuff, which is not procurable on

demand. And when the process is over, when the picture of symphony or lyric or novel (or whatever it is) is complete, the artist, looking back on it, will wonder how on earth he did it. And indeed he did not do it on earth.

A perfect example of the creative process is to be found in Kubla Khan. Assisted by opium, Coleridge had his famous dream and dipped deep into the subconscious. Waking up, he started to transcribe it, and was proceeding successfully when that person from Porlock unfortunately called on business.

Weave a circle round him thrice
And close your eyes with holy dread
For he on honeydew hath fed
And drunk the milk of Paradise—

and in came the person from Porlock. Coleridge could not resume. His connexion with the subconscious had snapped. He had created and did not know how he had done it. As Professor John Livingston Lowes has shown, many fragments of Coleridge's day-to-day reading are embedded in Kubla Khan, but the poem itself belongs to another world, which he was seldom to record.

The creative state of mind is akin to a dream. In Coleridge's case it was a dream. In other cases—Jane Austen's for instance—the dream is remote or sedate. But even Jane Austen, looking back upon Emma, could have thought 'Dear me, how came I to write that? It is not ill-contrived.' There is always, even with the most realistic artist, the sense of withdrawal from his own creation, the sense of surprise.

The French writer, Paul Claudel, gives the best description known to me of the creative state. It occurs in his poem 'La Ville'. A poet is speaking. He has been asked whence his inspiration comes, and how is it that when he speaks everything becomes explicable although he explains nothing. He replies:

I do not speak what I wish, but I conceive in sleep,
And I cannot explain whence I draw my breath,
For it is my breath which is drawn out of me.
I expand the emptiness within me, I open my mouth,
I breathe in the air, I breathe it out.
I restore it in the form of an intelligible word,
And having spoken I know what I have said.

here is a further idea in the passage, which my brief English paraphrase has not attempted to convey: the idea that if the breathing in is *inspiration*, the breathing out is *expiration*, a refiguring of death, when the life of a man will be drawn out of him by the unknown force for the last time. Creation and death are closely connected for Claudel. I'm confining myself, though, to his description of the creative act. How precisely it describes what happened in Kubla Khan. There is conception in sleep, there is the connexion between the subconscious and the conscious, which has to be effected before the work of art can be born, and there is the surprise of the creator at his own creation.

Je restitue une parole intelligible,
Et l'ayant dite, je sais ce que j'ai dit.

Which is exactly what happened to Coleridge. He spoke and then knew what he had said, but as soon as inspiration was interrupted he could not say any more.

After this glance at the creative state, let us glance at the critical. The critical state has many merits, and employs some of the highest and subtlest faculties of man. But it is grotesquely remote from the state responsible for the works it affects to compound. It does not let down buckets into the subconscious. It does not conceive in sleep, or know what it has said after it has said it. Think before you speak is criticism's motto; speak before you think creation's. Nor is criticism disconcerted by people driving from Porlock, in fact it sometimes comes from Porlock itself. While not excluding imagination and sympathy, it keeps them and all the faculties under control, and only employs them when they promise to be helpful.

Thus equipped, it advances on its object. It has two aims. The first and the more important is aesthetic. It considers the object itself, as an entity, and tells us what it can about its life. The second aim is subsidiary: the relation of the object to the rest of the world. Problems of less relevance are considered, such as the conditions under which the work of art was composed, the influences which formed it (criticism adores influences), the influence it has exercised on subsequent works, the artist's life, the lives of the artist's father and mother, pre-natal possibilities and so on, straying this way into psychology and that way into story. Much of the above is valuable. But if we wheel up an

aesthetic theory—the best attainable, and there are some excellent ones—if we wheel it up and apply it with its measuring rods and pliers and forceps, its callipers and catheters, to a particular work of art, we are visited at once, if we are sensitive, by a sense of the grotesque. It doesn't work, two universes have not even collided they have been juxtaposed. There is no spiritual parity. And if criticism strays from her central aesthetic quest to influences and psychological and historical considerations, something does happen then, contact is established. But no longer with a work of art.

A work of art is a curious object. Isn't it infectious? Unlike machinery, hasn't it the power of transforming the person who encounters it toward the condition of the person who created it? (I use the clumsy phrase 'toward the condition' on purpose.) We—we the beholders or listeners or whatever we are—undergo a change analogous to creation. We are rapt into a region near to that where the artist worked, and like him when we return to earth we feel surprised. To claim we actually entered his state and became co-creators with him, this is presumptuous. However much excited I am by Brahms' Fourth Symphony, I cannot suppose I feel Brahms' excitement, and probably what he felt is not what I understand as excitement. But there has been an infection from Brahms through his music to myself. Something has passed. I have been transformed toward his condition, he has called me out of myself, he has thrown me into a subsidiary dream; and when the passacaglia is trodden out, and the transformation closed, I too, feel surprise.

Unfortunately this infection, this sense of co-operation with creator, which is the supremely important step in our pilgrimage through the fine arts, is the one step over which criticism cannot help. She can prepare us for it generally, and educate us to keep our senses open, but she has to withdraw when reality approaches, like Virgil from Dante on the summit of Purgatory. With the coming of love, we have to rely on Beatrice, whom we have loved all along, and if we have never loved Beatrice we are lost. We shall remain pottering about with theories and influences and psychological and historical considerations—supports useful in their time, but they must be left behind at the entry of Heaven. I would not suggest that our comprehension of the fine arts is or should be of a nature of a mystic union. But, as in mysticism, we

enter an unusual state, and we can only enter it through love. Putting it more prosaically, we cannot understand music unless we desire to hear it. And so we return to the earth.

Let us reconsider that troublesome object, the work of art, and observe another way in which it is recalcitrant to criticism. I am thinking of its freshness. So far as it is authentic, it presents itself eternally virgin. It expects always to be heard or read or seen for the first time, always to cause surprise. It does not expect to be studied, still less does it present itself as a crossword puzzle, only to be solved after much re-examination. If it does that, if it trades a mystifying element, it is, to that extent, not a work of art, not an immortal Muse, but a Sphinx who dies as soon as her riddles are answered. The work of art assumes the existence of the perfect recipient, and is indifferent to the fact that no such person exists. It does not allow for our ignorance and it does not cater for knowledge.

This eternal freshness in creation presents a difficulty to the critic, who when he hears or reads or sees a work a second time lightly profits by what he has heard or read or seen of it the first time, and studies and compares, remembers and analyses, and often has to reject his original impressions as trivial. He may thus at the end gain a just and true opinion of the work, but he ought to remain startled and this is usually beyond him. Take Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the one in A. Isn't it in A? The opening bars announce that key as explicitly as fifths can, leaving us only in doubt as to whether the movement will decide on the major or minor mode. In the fifteenth bar comes the terrifying surprise, the pounce into D minor, which tethers the music, however far it wanders, right down to the ineluctable close. Can one hope to feel that terror and surprise twice? Can one avoid hearing the opening bars as a preparation for the pounce—and thus miss the pounce? Can we combine experience and innocence? I think we can. The willing suspension of experience is possible, it is possible to become like a child who says 'Oh!' each time the ball bounces, although he has seen it bounce before and knows it must bounce.

It is possible, but it is rare. The critic who is thoroughly versed in the score of the Ninth Symphony and can yet hear the opening bars as a trembling introduction in A to the unknown, has reached the highest rank in his profession. Most of us are content

to remain well informed. It is so restful to be well informed. We forget that Beethoven intended his Symphony to be heard always for the first time. We forget with still greater ease that Tchaikovsky intended the same for his Piano Concerto in B flat minor. Dubious for good reasons of that thumping affair, we sometimes scold him for being 'stale'—a ridiculous accusation, for it too, was created as an eternal virgin, it too should startle each time it galumphed down the waltz. No doubt the Concerto, and much music, has been too often performed, just as some pictures have been too often looked at. Freshness of reception is exhausted more rapidly by a small or imperfect object than by a great one. Nevertheless the objects themselves are eternally new, it is the recipient who may wither. At the opening of Goethe's 'Faust' Mephistopheles, being stale himself, found the world stale and reported it as such to the Almighty. The archangels took no notice of him and continued to sing of eternal freshness. The critic ought to combine Mephistopheles with the archangels' experience with innocence. He ought to know everything insidiously out, and yet be surprised. Virginia Woolf—who was both creative artist and a great critic—believed in reading a book twice. The first time she was an archangel she abandoned herself to the author unreservedly. The second time she was Mephistopheles; she treated him with severity and allowed him to get away with nothing he could not justify. After these two readings she felt qualified to discuss the book. Here is good rule of thumb advice. But it does not take us to the heart of our problem, which is super-rational. For we ought really to read the book in two ways at once. (And we ought to look at a picture in two ways at once, and to listen to music similarly.) We ought to perform a miracle, the nature of which was hinted at by the Almighty when he said he was always glad to receive Mephistopheles in Heaven and hear him chat.

I would speak tentatively, but it seems to me that we are more likely to perform that miracle in the case of music. Music, more than the other arts, postulates a double existence. It exists in time and also exists outside time, instantaneously. With no philosophical training, I cannot put my belief clearly, but I can conceive myself hearing a piece as it goes by and also when it has finished. In the latter case I should hear it as an entity, as a piece of sound architecture, not as a sound-sequence, not as something divisible

bars. Yet it would be organically connected with the concert-performance. Architecture and sequence would, in my comprehension, be more closely fused than the two separate readings of a book in Virginia Woolf's.

IV

The claim of criticism to take us to the heart of the Arts must before be disallowed. Another claim has been made for it, a more precise one. It has been suggested that criticism can help an artist to improve his work. If that be true, a *raison d'être* is established at once. Criticism becomes an important figure, a handmaid-beauty, holding out the sacred lamp in whose light creation proceeds, feeding the lamp with oil, trimming the wick when it goes or smokes. It would be interesting to know whether criticism has helped musicians in their work today, and if so. Has she held up the lamp? No doubt she illuminates past mistakes or merits, that certainly is within her power, but has the latter knowledge of them any practical value?

A remark of Mr. C. Day Lewis is interesting in this connexion. Comes at the opening of his admirable book, *The Poetic Image*.

There is something formidable for the poet in the idea of criticism—something, dare I say it? almost unreal. He writes a poem, then he moves on to a new experience, the next poem: and when a critic comes along and tells him what is right or wrong about the first poem, he has a feeling of irrelevance.

Nothing almost unreal. That is a just remark. The poet is always developing and moving on, and when his creative state is broken into by comments on something he has just put behind him, he feels bewildered. His reaction is 'What are you talking about? Must you?' Once again, and in its purest form, the division between the critical and creative states, the absence of mutual parity, becomes manifest. In its purest form, because poetry is an extreme form of art, and is a convenient field for experiment. My own art, the mixed art of fiction, is less suitable, I can truly say with Mr. C. Day Lewis that I have nearly always found criticism irrelevant. When I am praised, I am pleased; when I am blamed, I am displeased; when I am told I am elusive, I am surprised—but neither the pleasure nor the

sorrow nor the astonishment makes any difference when next enter the creative state. One can eliminate a particular defect perhaps; to substitute merit is the difficulty. I remember that one of my earlier novels I was blamed for the number of sudden deaths in it which were said to amount to forty-four per cent of the fictional population. I took heed and arranged that characters in subsequent novels should die less frequently and give previous notice where possible by means of illness or some other acceptable device. But I was not inspired to put anything vital in the place of the sudden deaths. The only remedy for a defect is inspiration, that subconscious stuff that comes up in the bucket. A piece of contemporary music, to my ear, has a good many sudden deaths in it; the phrases expire as rapidly as the characters in my novel, the chords cut each other's throats, the arpeggio has a heart attack, the fugue gets into a nose dive. But these defects—if defects they be—are doubtless vital to the general conception. They are not to be remedied by substituting sweetness. And the musicians would do well to ignore the critic even when he admits the justice of a particular criticism.

Only in two ways can criticism help the artist a little with his work. The first is general. He ought—if he keeps company at all—to keep good company. To be alone may be best—to be alone was that Fate reserved for Beethoven. But if he wishes to come into contact with ideas and standards and the works of his fellows—and usually has to in the modern world—he must beware of second-rate. It means a relaxation of fibre, a temptation to rest in his own superiority. I do not desire to use the words ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ about human individuals; in an individual so many factors are present that one cannot grade him. But one can legitimately apply them to cultural standards, and the artist should be critical here and alive in particular to the risks of the clique. The clique is a valuable social device, which only a fanatic would condemn; it can protect and encourage the artist. It is the artist's duty, if he needs to be in a clique, to choose a good one, and take care it doesn't make him bumptious or sterile or silly. The lowering of critical standards in what one may call daily student life, their corruption by adulation or jealousy, may lead to inferior work. Good standards may lead to good work. That is all there seems to be to say about this vague assistance, and maybe it was not worth saying.

The second way in which criticism can help the artist is more specific. It can help him over details, niggling details, minutiae of style. To refer to my own work again, I have certainly benefited by being advised not to use the word 'but' so often. I have had a university education, you see, and it disposes one to overwork at particular conjunction. It is the strength of the academic mind to be fair and see both sides of a question. It is its weakness to be timid and to suffer from that fear-of-giving-oneself-away disease which Samuel Butler speaks. Both its strength and its weakness incline it to the immoderate use of 'but'. A good many 'buts' have occurred in this paper, but not as many as if I hadn't been warned. The writer of the opposed type, the extrovert, the man who knows what he knows, and likes what he likes, and doesn't care who knows it—he should doubtless be subject to the opposite discipline; he should be criticized because he never uses 'but'; he should be tempted to employ the qualifying clause. The man who has a legal mind should probably go easy on his 'if's'. Trivial little matters. Yes, I know. The sort of trifling help which criticism can give the artist. She cannot help him in great matters. With these random considerations my paper must close. The latter part of it has been overshadowed and perhaps obsessed by my consciousness of the gulf between the creative and critical arts. Perhaps the gulf does not exist, perhaps it does not signify, perhaps I have been making a gulf out of a molehill. But in my view it does prevent the establishment of a first-class *raison d'être* for criticism in the arts. The only activity which can establish such a *raison d'être* is love. However cautiously, or with whatever reservations, after whatsoever purifications, we must come back to love. That alone raises us to the co-operation with the artist which is the sole reason for our aesthetic pilgrimage. That alone promises spiritual parity. My main conclusion on criticism has therefore to be unfavourable; it does not and cannot go to the heart of them, nor have I succeeded in finding that it has given substantial help to the artists.

The earlier part of the paper was confined to subsidiary topics and here a defence for criticism could easily be established. Criticism can educate, theorize, analyse, stimulate—admirable achievements, and when I say defence is easy I do not mean that I performed it adequately. Much more could have been said and what was said could have been much better said.

D. H. KAHNWEILER

NEGRO ART AND CUBISM

ABOUT the year 1907, a few painters with their friends began to form haphazard collections of African Negro and Oceanic sculptures. I will not refer here to the actual details of this historic event: I have elaborated them in my *Juan Gris*.¹ The important fact is that we bought these sculptures as works of art, and not as objects of interest. It seems obvious that works so utterly different from those formerly admitted to the official aesthetic hierarchy should have some connexion with the aims the painters who attributed an artistic value to these sculptures had set themselves. Certainly, some of these painters were solely concerned with pure aesthetic enjoyment; others merely imitated the visual aspects of these sculptures.

Public opinion immediately connected *Cubism* with Negro art by styling the years between 1907 and 1909 as the 'Negro period' in Picasso's work. This was its method of proclaiming that Picasso's paintings (the only Cubist painter known to a wide public at this time, thanks to his 'Blue' and 'Rose' periods) resembled African sculptures. However naïve this way of considering the question may be, it is correct in establishing a connexion between the *Cubist* painters and Negro art.

In fact, the same relationship does not exist between Negro art and that of the *other* painters who had begun to acquire African sculptures. Matisse, with his intelligence and acute sensibility, was capable of appreciating these sculptures at their true value; but neither his painting nor his sculpture shows any signs of admiration. His works explain themselves without recourse to anything outside the European tradition. By their 'primitive' appearance some of Derain's works are connected to Gauguin—somewhat later to Gothic art—but not to the Negro artists. As for Vlaminck, the 'barbaric' aspect of a few of his pictures—such as the 'Baigneuses' of 1909—certainly shows the influence of the appearance of African sculptures, but not the slightest understanding of their spirit.

If we admit public opinion was not mistaken in connectin

¹ *Juan Gris: his life and work*, by D. H. Kahnweiler. Lund Humphries, 1947

cubist painters and African sculptures, we must try to assess their true relationships. I have already said that we had begun to collect these sculptures as well as the objects of Oceanic art.¹ However, our interest was to concentrate itself more and more in the productions of Negro Africa. Nearly twenty years later, the surrealists developed a passionate enthusiasm for Oceanic art. Nevertheless, I must, once more, dispute the validity of the thesis of a direct influence of African art on Picasso and Braque, the two cubist painters of that time. The real question was one of convergence. European tradition and, in particular, the Cubist discovery of Cézanne's true intentions enable us to understand the trends which made their appearance in Picasso's 'Demoiselles d'Avignon' (1907) and in Braque's landscapes of Estaque (1908). Their appearance (if an exterior cause is insisted on) is easily explained by the example of the painting, and, even more, by the sculpture of Gauguin during his stay in Oceania, both of which show the Polynesian influence on this painter. This is not a question of an influence of Negro art on the Cubists, but rather of a phenomenon usual at the beginning of a break with the existing tradition. We try to reassure ourselves by finding elsewhere, in time and space, confirmation of the new trends we adopt. Other examples of this are the 'Renaissance' rediscovering Greco-Roman art and the Impressionists' great enthusiasm for Japanese art.

How did African art corroborate the thought of the Cubist painters? What was its lesson? Once again, I must emphasize that these painters were aiming at as precise, as absolute as possible a presentation, as well as at the creation of works with an autonomous existence. Such an art is essentially conceptual. Also years of work were needed in order to achieve a true conceptual art. The coloured artist always shows us what he knows and not what he sees. For example, he represents all the parts of the human body, carefully enumerating them. One day, Matisse, showing me a 'seated woman' in his collection, drew my attention to the fact that the posterior of this woman, hidden by the seat of the chair, appeared underneath the chair. Negro sculpture displays things with the minimum of means. Its relief is simplified in the

¹ *Negerplastik*, by Carl Einstein, the first book to appear on Negro art as art, makes no distinction between African and Oceanic art. It would be wrong to criticize it for this. It was concerned with the plastic discovery of these arts, not with ethnography. Their classification could wait.

extreme, it suppresses everything which is not essential. The *unity* of every sculpture is complete, each component strictly subjected to the whole. What is more, in Negro art the Cubists rediscovered their own conception of the work of art as *object*. Impressionism, the extreme climax of an evolution which had begun with the Renaissance, had reduced the work of art to the role of a reflection of a momentary aspect of the exterior world, retained by the artist's imagination. Now, the plastic work of art differing, in this respect, from the literary work of art has an *objective* existence in the real world, and it is only by safeguarding this existence that the artist can be sure of transmitting to everyone, present and future, the lived experience which he means to snatch from the destructive action of time. The African artist creates real *objects* which, with their possibility of being put anywhere, demanding neither base nor plinth, and with no connexion to any pre-existing architecture, are pre-eminently real *sculpture*.¹

At the outset, Cubist art was *static* to the point of appearing almost frozen. In Negro art it rediscovered another static art. What is still more important is that Cubist art was aiming at the creation of *plastic realities*. It repudiated the imitation of the consequences of merely a unique visual perception. Later, it was to lead to the invention of plastic signs meaning fairly obviously a 'reality' of the exterior world, in order to 'be' that reality. Now an African sculpture is a sign, an emblem, in its entirety as it is in each of its details; it leads to the creation of the 'reality' signified in the spectator's imagination. This arm, this leg, this chest, this sex—all of them are signs. The statue as a whole is a sign. By 'reading' these signs we understand that it is a man, or a woman who are even recognizable to the connoisseur as originally from certain district, members of a certain tribe, or of some clan. The bare essential is intimated. The individual alone is represented; often even the 'terrasse', the usual plinth in European sculpture, is missing.

In a very muddled way this is what we were discovering in Negro art. The Cubist painters felt themselves encouraged in their work by the existence of an art which they guessed to be closely related. We can see that the *appearance* of the Negro sculpture

¹ Obviously, I am talking of the spirit which animates the whole of Negro sculpture. I know that decorative works exist, forming part of a whole; such as the bas-reliefs of Abomey.

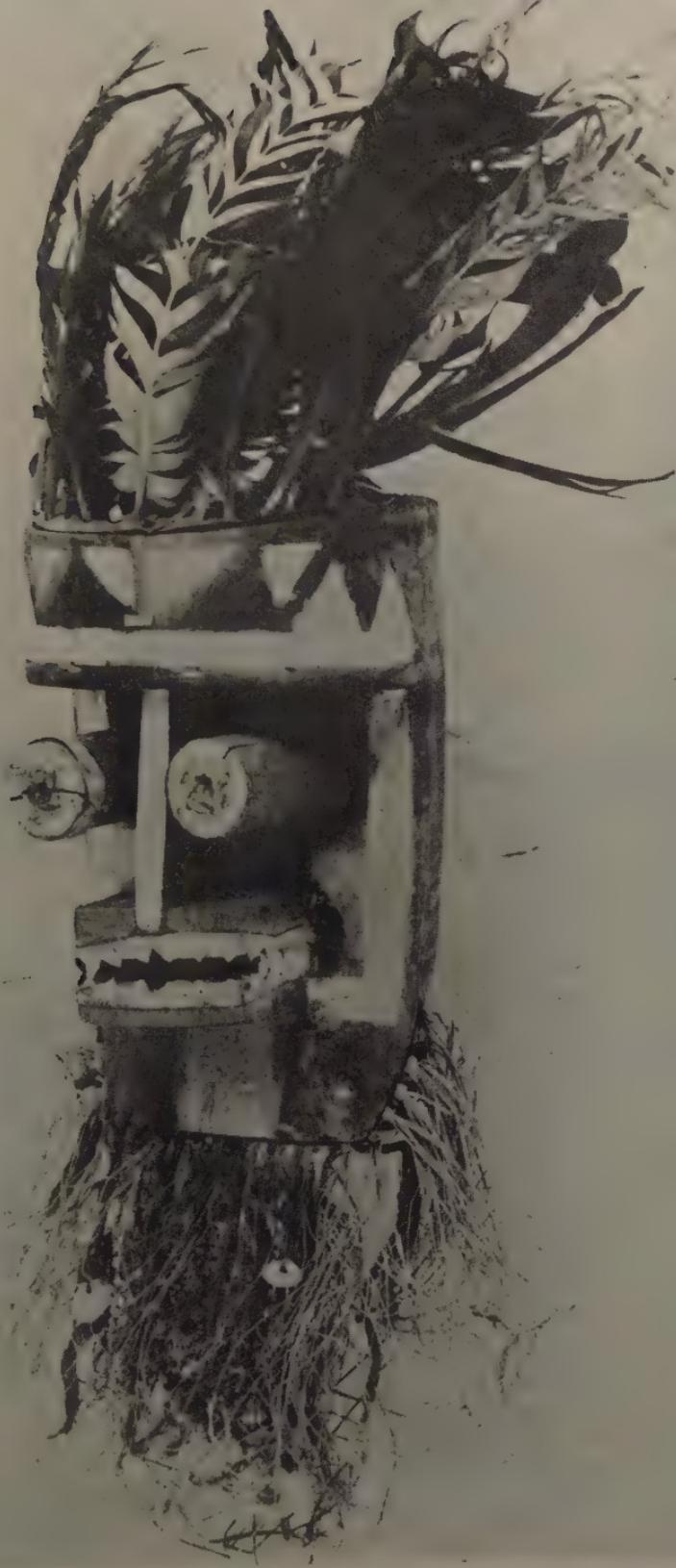
which the people of that time thought they rediscovered in the Picasso figures of 1907 to 1909, did not play any part in the cult professed by the Cubist painters for African art. This appearance, which still struck most people at that date as *primitive*, had ceased to be primitive for them and appeared to be just the result of a correct and valid conception of sculpture which ought to become their own. A few years before, Alois Riegl had published his *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*,¹ and had been the first to demonstrate that all art is the perfect expression of its cultural milieu and that its 'style' is never falsified by an *incapacity* (such as imitating the exterior world, for instance). This proposition robs the term 'primitive' of all meaning, at any rate in so far as it is used in the pejorative sense which still persists to the present day. For us, Negro art was an art like all the others, an art which we rated very highly but which we were only just beginning to be acquainted with. I myself had hardly yet thought about it, and I did not know that it was an essentially *religious* art, an art which the need to represent mythological beings—gods, ancestors—in an invariable way deflected from the imitation of the variable, leading it to the representation of type. We know that this is equally true of Christian art, but the Judaic prohibition against making idols has diverted it towards painting, whereas the African spirit finds its expression in sculpture.

Slowly we were learning to know more about African works of art. Only a few years later, the Cubist painters, having made a study of them, were to find in them a lesson whose results would be fundamental for *European sculpture*. The Cubists, we imagine, were chiefly interested in the problems of painting. Nevertheless, after a certain time, they were prevented by what was at stake from limiting their researches in this way. The upheaval which they started communicated itself into sculpture. From then on, without knowing the exact reason for it, their efforts tended towards a *liberation* of the plastic arts by the affirmation of their real nature, which is that of *handwriting*. Plastic art is nothing but handwriting, although more or less irrational pre-occupations often divert an art towards aims which deny it the unequivocal manifestation of its nature as handwriting. It attains its freedom by admitting, by proclaiming this fact. No longer forced to attach itself to the imitation of the visible world whose fragments

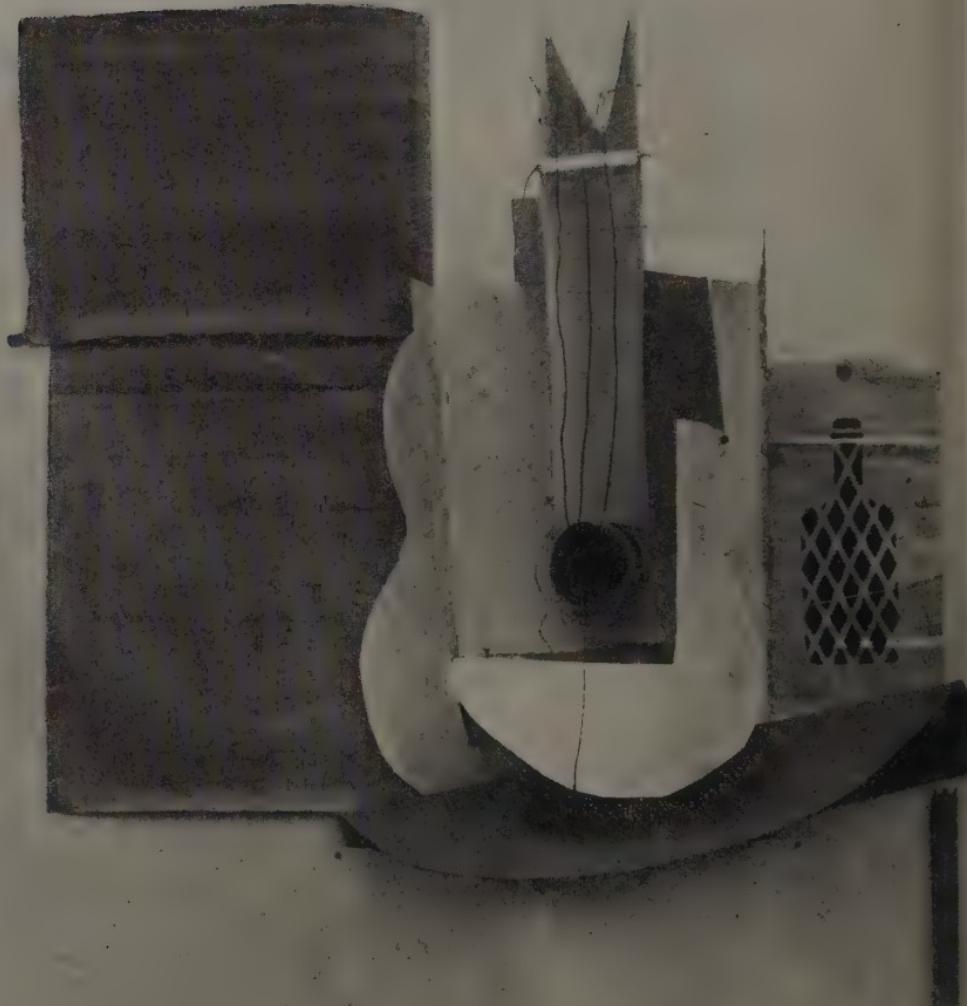
¹ At that time none of us knew about this book.

compressed in the mass of the statue or in the rectangle of the painting or bas-relief, knock into each other, injure each other, threatening to break the unity of the work of art, it can, in the interior of the work of art, build up signs which have come from its own essence, and which, in another respect, signify the exterior world. This is roughly what the Cubist painters felt. Negro sculpture encouraged them in this direction. Imitation embarrassed them more and more. It was in opposition to the austere architecture they aimed at in their pictures. For this reason they revolted against the *means of illusion*. Of these, they were particularly shocked by chiaroscuro both because of its imitative character, and also by the falsification of local tone it required. Since 1909, Picasso had tried to introduce *real relief*—a very light relief—into a picture to avoid the *simulated shadow*; but this subterfuge could not satisfy the two Cubist painters. However, it led them to make a further study of sculpture and its means. On various occasions, Picasso had himself already made sculpture, but only one mask of 1907 showed an attempt at innovation in this art (a nose, represented in a non-imitative manner is 'folded back' on to the side). A 'head of a woman' from early 1910 appears to be an attempt to reproduce a 'head and shoulders' independent of the surrounding light, by giving it its own light, which is achieved by means of an extremely indented and perforated surface, in such a way as to multiply the shadows. However, in spite of the really novel appearance of this bust, this does not mark a real break with the tendencies of European sculpture, in particular with those of Rodin.

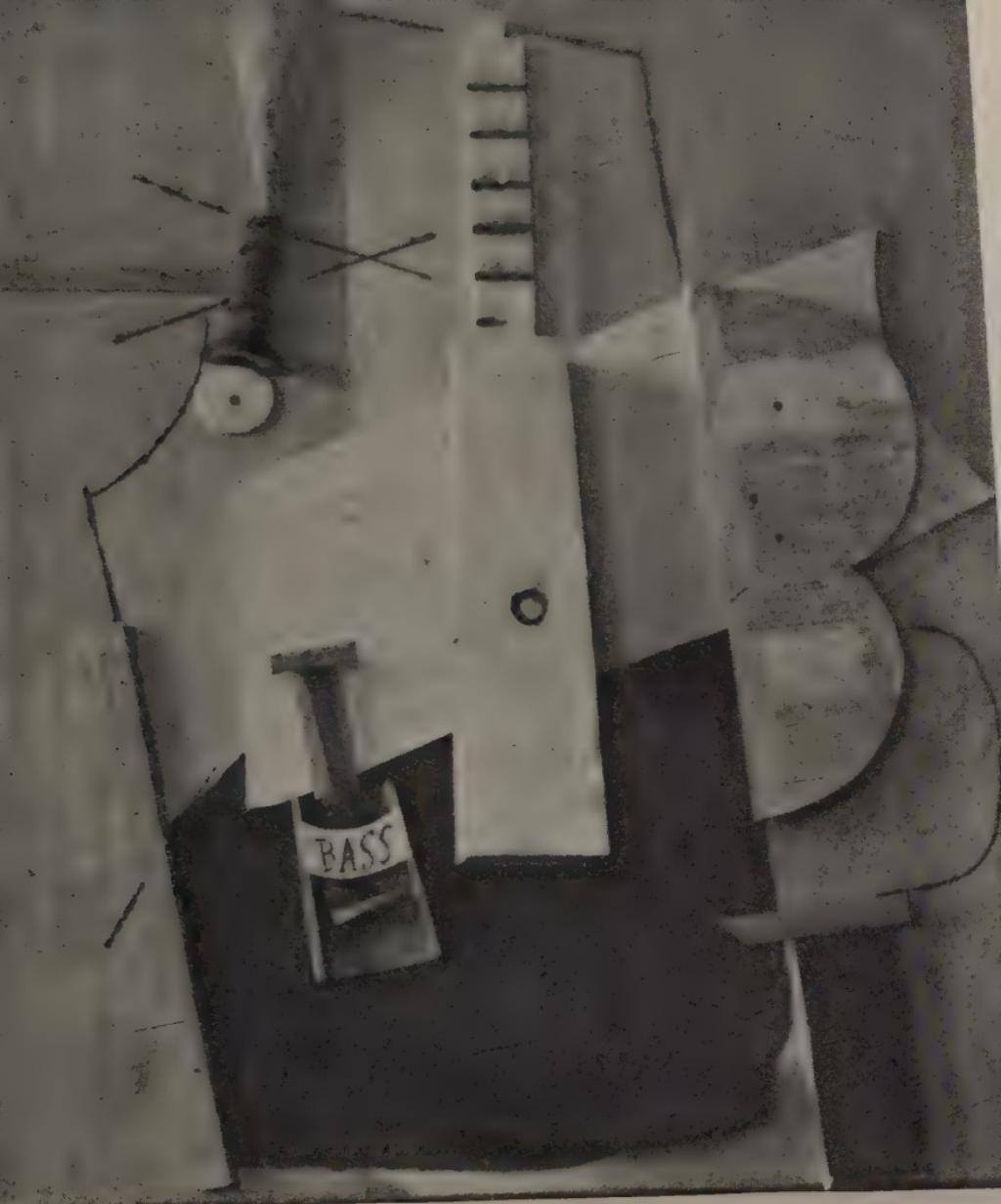
It took a long time for the Cubist painters to realize that European sculpture had completely degenerated, and that by the end of the nineteenth century it was in reality not even real sculpture any more, that is to say, sculpture with authentic three-dimensional validity. Ever since it began, European sculpture had been threatened by this danger. Born towards the end of the Christian Middle Ages, at its inception, it was forced to reckon with the iconoclastic tendencies of Christianity, link itself to architecture, and style itself as ornament, attaching itself to the wall, from which it breaks away in the Renaissance. The nineteenth century sees its decline and Impressionism completes its downfall. With Medardo Rosso and with Rodin, who was himself influenced by this forgotten Italian sculptor, it tries to envelop



Musée de l'Homme, Paris



PICASSO. Sheet-iron, paper and wire relief. 1913.



PICASSO. Guitar and bottle of Bass. Wood relief. 1913.



Museum of Modern Art, New York

PICASSO. *Les demoiselles d'Avignon.* 1906-7.

On exhibition at '40,000 years of Modern Art', Academy Hall,
165 Oxford St., London, W.1. 20 December-29 January.

itself with its own atmosphere, and in this way loses, so to speak, its own limits, and what is more, its cubic *existence in space*.¹ Now this constitutes the very essence of sculpture. Like painting, bas-relief is forced to seek the support of a wall, carves an imaginary space out of the wall, unless it makes this imaginary space appear to exist between the spectator and the wall (as was the case both with the first Cubist paintings and the frescoes of Giotto and his contemporaries). It should be said here that this creation of space is the criterion of belonging to the figurative plastic arts other than sculpture in round relief. Decoration remains a flat ornamentation on the level surface; it creates absolutely no space for the spectator.

Negro sculpture itself pre-eminently possessed the *cubic existence* in real space, by which genuine sculpture can be recognized.² On the other hand, its very marked character as a 'sign' preserved it from any confusion with human beings living in the same space. There is a danger of this when sculpture is imitative. It protects itself from this by various means: by dimensions smaller or larger than life-size, by monochrome, or by a base which raises it above the people walking around. Picasso and Braque, discovering in Negro sculpture the qualities of *real sculpture*, had nevertheless not yet found a remedy for what embarrassed them so much in painting, that is to say, the need to use the means of illusion to depict volume. It is true that no one had yet really penetrated the character of the *signs* belonging to this sculpture. As a matter of fact, they were always trying to define the objects in the pictures by various figurations showing them from several sides. They placed these figurations *side by side* without succeeding in combining them, as Picasso did later on, into a single sign.

The beginning of synthetic Cubism is the crucial moment. From that time, the Cubist painters—Gris and Léger had just joined Braque and Picasso—resolutely dispensed with all imitation in order to create real *signs*. In so doing, they rediscovered the true direction of the figurative plastic arts. *Negro sculpture* permitted these painters to see clearly into the problems which had been confused by the evolution of European art, and to find a solution

¹ Of course, I realize how this destructive action contained simultaneously both the desire for and the possibility of liberation.

² I only mean here *Negro statues*. The masks are *reliefs* and it is perhaps for this reason that they have been so instructive to the Cubist painters.

which, by avoiding every art of illusion, resulted in the liberty to which they aspired.

European sculpture, together with that of all the civilizations which had up till that moment entered the museums, preserves on itself an *uninterrupted surface* similar to that of all living entities, animals, plants, etc. In a sense, this 'skin' is without any solution of continuity, and defines the limits of the person depicted. To put it briefly, it is possible to visualize these sculptures as mouldings on nature, mouldings which are sometimes deformed, drawn-out or compressed, but which always preserve a *compact structure*, without a crack, and whose surface constitutes the diagram of the person 'read' by the spectator. Now, in certain Ivory Coast masks, the Cubist painters discovered marks which, without recourse to imitation, compelled the spectator to imagine the face whose 'real' shape these masks did not imitate. That, I am sure, was the decisive discovery which allowed painting to create invented signs freed sculpture from the mass, and led it to transparency. I do not affirm this without careful consideration. People will say that these painters could have found still more significant examples of open-work sculpture in certain Sudanese masks and in the sculptures of New Zealand. I am not so sure about this, for it seems to me that the solution found by the Ivory Coast sculptors goes much further than the simple transparent sculpture which still preserves an aspect of imitation. However, the fact is that Picasso had a wobé mask in his possession, and it is the study of this mask which originated the upheaval which took place at that time. Wobé masks, as is perhaps known, show, underneath a very high forehead slightly bent backwards, the lower half of the face as a flat surface from which project the triangular nose, the parallelepiped mouth and the cylindrical eyes. These cylinders are five centimetres wide and about ten centimetres high. All these signs, which have absolutely nothing imitative about them—notice particularly the representation of the eyes by cylinders in relief—create a face of compelling grandeur in the spectator's imagination. We should carefully consider this: the wobé mask does not offer the spectator a ready-made diagram of this face in relief—however deformed it may be—as do Romanesque sculpture, Sumerian or Egyptian art. The boundaries of this face are only defined by the contour of the mask, not by its volume. The real 'shape' of the face represented as it is seen forms itself in front of the mask, at

the end of the cylinder eyes. In this way the eyes are seen in concave.

Now, let us consider the works of Picasso and Braque around 1912. Their paintings, with their 'superimposed planes', are often only the transposition—I will even say the imitation—into painting of a *sculptural* means which found its legitimate use in Braque's paper reliefs which have been destroyed, and in Picasso's reliefs in various materials of which a few survive. By examining these (dating from 1913 and 1914) it is impossible to doubt my proposition that it was the wobé masks which opened these painters' eyes. For example, the hollow of the guitar in some of Picasso's reliefs is marked by a projecting lead cylinder, in others by a plastilene cone. How can we fail to recognize in these the means (identical in the first case) by which the Ivory Coast artists create a volume whose limits they only indicate by the height of the cylinders representing the eyes?

The kind of 'transparency' which is thus achieved for the first time in *relief*, appears in *three-dimensional* European sculpture in Picasso's 1914 'Verre d'absinthe' of painted bronze. In this, the interior of the glass is simultaneously shown with its exterior shape. Perhaps someone will raise the objection that it is the transparency of the glass which is imitated in this way. Very likely. It is possible that Picasso needed this excuse to reassure himself, but it is no less true that the discovery of transparent sculpture is established by this glass and by the reliefs which seem to me considerably more important. Thus, in European art, *emblem sculpture replaces sculpture derived from mouldings on nature*, opening up the way to all that has been achieved since: 'drawing in space', sculptures in iron wire, in string, in wicker, constructions in wood, iron, etc. Like architecture, such a sculpture creates spaces as well as volumes, thereby superbly increasing its scope.

It is quite useless for someone or other to boast of having been the first to make use of one of these new *techniques*. The works of the pre-1914 Cubist painters contained them all, implicitly. I will prove this. I am neither creator nor prophet. I have only conscientiously observed the efforts of my friends. Now, in my essay 'Das Wesen der Bildhauerei',¹ written in 1915 and published in 1919, I said: 'We feel that a *real* sculpture must be born. Many

¹ Feuer, Sarrebrück, Jahrgang I, Heft 2-3, November-December, 1919

signs foretell it. What will it be like? By breaking the surface of bodies, will it show us them perforated, open? Probably....'

It is certain that the principle of transparent sculpture had been found, since I was able to predict its advent. The Cubist painter had discovered this principle in the Ivory Coast masks, a principle which has played an important part in their liberating and constructive action. They also had made use of the same means employed by the makers of wobé masks in order to create form. What is more, in doing this, they had understood the power of 'plastic signs', and of 'emblems', far removed from all imitation. The admirable liberty of the art of our time, which opens it up to unbelievable possibilities, we owe to the example of Negro art.

[Translated by PETER WATSON]

ALAN ROSS

RUMBLE AMONG THE DRUMS

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD (1896-1940)
AND THE JAZZ AGE

IT is less than eight years since Scott Fitzgerald's death, yet he appears as much a 'period' writer as if he had never survived the Jazz Age he so typically and beautifully epitomized. Re-reading him now, at what should be the most awkward moment to see him in perspective, he offers none of the real ambiguities of his contemporaries. For, in essence, Scott Fitzgerald was a writer of the twenties, a phase of behaviour that, with its inflated values and its code of maudlin excess, existed within precise and definable limits—a phase that, as Fitzgerald wrote, 'leaped to a spectacular death in October 1929'.

In the same essay, *Echoes of the Jazz Age* (1931), Fitzgerald said of this period 'It is as dead as were the Yellow Nineties in 1902. Yet the present writer already looks back to it with nostalgia. It

more him up, flattered him and gave him more money than he had dreamed of, simply for telling people that he felt as they did So Fitzgerald simplified his whole art, whose central motif was the clarification of nostalgia, in terms suitable for the magazine audience he came increasingly to address. Fitzgerald was a prolific writer, of remarkable inventiveness and attack, yet of all his varied writing, nothing remains as readable or as much to the point today as the sequence of essays—*Echoes of the Jazz Age*, *My Lost City*, *Show Mr. and Mrs. F. to Number*—, that culminated in *The Crack-Up*. For in these short pieces Fitzgerald interwove, succinctly and gracefully, his own personal narrative with that of the twenties. They have a compression and force that of his more ambitious writing only his novel *The Great Gatsby* and stories like *Crazy Sunday* and *The Rich Boy*, begin to equal. In the same way, it becomes apparent that just as the technique of these autobiographical sequences is documentary, it is precisely the least fictional of Fitzgerald's books that are the best. His achievement, or perhaps his fortune, was that he was typical of his age before his age became typical of itself. It lived in him just as he lived off it and never developed beyond it. Yet what gives his account of the Jazz Age a meaning far beyond its merit as social history, was the sense Fitzgerald had for the essentials of a subject, for the limitations inherent in the very qualities that made it exciting. In this best writing one is made continually aware of the ephemerality of both the convention and the characters; yet at the same time one knows that by some instinct, that is not the result of experience, Fitzgerald is aware too. It is as if his very self-indulgence towards his subjects, his knowledge of their weaknesses, absolved them. The beauty of these Jazz Age stories is increased through the fatal disease we feel eating into the surface animation Fitzgerald so bravely maintained. 'The American function', H. L. Mencken wrote, 'is to amuse the world. We are the Bryan, the Henry Ford, the Billy Sunday among the nations . . . ', and in Fitzgerald one gets the beginning of a tradition, as in the theatre, that the show must go on regardless of what may be happening in the private world of its characters. So from Long Island to the Riviera and back, from Princeton to Hollywood, the nervous façade was kept up, like a talisman whose outward preservation might, by some miracle, delay the deterioration within. It was a vain hope predestined to failure; yet the very failure of

Fitzgerald's own life gives a poignancy, a more moving tension to the age whose pleasure domes crumbled in a night and which, decade later, possessed the tell-tale foibles and dating attitudes of a yellowing family photograph.

'Now once more the belt is tight and we summon the proper expression of horror as we look back at our wasted youth. Sometimes, though, there is a ghostly rumble among the drums, an asthmatic whisper in the trombones that swings me back into the early twenties when we drank wood alcohol and every day, in every way, grew better and better, and there was a first abortive shortening of the skirts, and girls all looked alike in sweated dresses, and people you didn't want to know said "Yes, we have no bananas", and it seemed only a question of a few years before the older people would step aside and let the world be run by those who saw things as they were—and it all seems rosy and romantic to us who were young then, because we will never feel quite so intensely about our surroundings any more.'

So the Jazz Age ended. But, piece by piece, Fitzgerald re-created it, because its atmosphere of cocktails and flappers, Constance Bennett in the Club de Vingt, Marion Davies at the Midnight Frolic, and at five o'clock in the Ritz the ripening of a subtle melody—'the light clat-clat of one lump, two lumps, into the cup and the ding of the shining teapots and creampots as they kiss elegantly in transit upon a silver tray'—meant something extra to him, because it coincided with his success and because coming to it as he did, an outsider from the Middle West, it never became completely real to him. To him, as to Gatsby, it was always something that had been bought, and, once having found it, he had to dredge it beyond even disillusion—'Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year receded before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther . . . And one fine morning—'.

It is unlikely that Fitzgerald ever really believed in the message of hope that the wonderful last sentence of *The Great Gatsby* disguises—'So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past'—but its implied extension of limits, its fluttering of wings for a flight to new playgrounds, are part of the gradually widening horizon the Irish Mid-westerner had sooner or later to take in his stride.

There are many aspects of Fitzgerald's writing and many approaches to it that can be, or have been, made. Yet the most satisfactory, and there is enough material to pursue it, is his own account and attitude as revealed in his note-books and letters. The four essays I have mentioned give a better insight into his character, the nature of his entrée into the 'smart set' (the title incidentally of the magazine in which, under Mencken's, editorship he published his first story) and of what New York in its first post-war flush meant to him, than could any account by an outside observer. They deal with his family consciousness, his romantic attitude to his Irish origins, Princeton and the War, the early lyrical years of his marriage, and finally the causes of the nervous breakdown that cut his life (and work) into two dissimilar parts. His first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), formalized the Princeton era and introduced him, through its fantastic success, to the world that was to make and destroy him. *The Great Gatsby* (1925), remains his one almost perfect achievement—a short but beautifully balanced, written and constructed novel, which might have been merely the first of a remarkable series had he, in fact, not been himself. Fifteen years later he wrote to his daughter 'I wish now I'd never relaxed or looked back—but said at the end of *The Great Gatsby*, 'I've found my line—from now on this comes first. This is my immediate duty—without this I am nothing.' But, instead, the alter ego of the serious, conscientious craftsman his notebooks prove him took charge, and the drug of writing for wide-circulation magazines, of maintaining a flashy standard of living to keep up with 'society', produced the schizophrenic mentality that, at its highest level, only produced in *Tender is the Night* (1934), with its shifting emphases, its loose writing, a faithful record of his own deterioration, the breakdown of his personal relations, integrity and ability to concentrate. This period, though *Tender is the Night* is largely autobiographical in its essentials, is finally documented in *The Crack-Up*. The years that follow, in which Fitzgerald made the best use of the 'cracked plate' he had become—which 'has to be kept in service as a household necessity . . . it will not be brought out for company, but it will do to hold crackers late at night or to go into the ice-box under left-overs'—are fairly well described in the letters to his daughter from Hollywood, in the notes for, and in, *The Last*

Tycoon itself. It is in these letters and in the contemporaneous extracts from his notebooks that one gets the closest view of Fitzgerald, both as a professional novelist describing the technique of his craft and as a human being analysing his relation to that side of him which is a writer. They record also his years of defeat, though, as he himself was aware, the first defeat, after which there can really be no other, came when the girl he was in love with turned him down. 'During a long summer of despair I wrote a novel instead of letters, so it came out all right, but it came out all right for a different person. The man with the jingle of money in his pocket who married the girl a year later would always cherish an abiding distrust, an animosity toward the leisure class—not the conviction of a revolutionist but the smouldering hatred of a peasant. In the years since then I have never been able to stop wondering where my friends' money came from, nor to stop thinking that at one time a sort of *droit de seigneur* might have been exercised to give one of them my girl.'

Ten years earlier than he had expected, at the age of thirty-nine, Fitzgerald made a token renouncement of his humanity. 'I have now at last become a writer only. The man I had persistently tried to be, became such a burden that I have "cut him loose" with as little compunction as a Negro lady cuts loose a rival on Saturday night' . . . The old dream of being an entire man in the Goethe-Byron-Shaw tradition, with an opulent American touch, a sort of combination of J. P. Morgan, Topham Beauclerk and St. Francis of Assisi, has been relegated to the junk heap of the shoulder pads worn for one day on the Princeton freshman football field and the overseas cap never worn overseas. It can be seen from this that the early symbols of Fitzgerald's disenchantment were not very profound. Nor were the later. In 1936, aware of his inability to live up to his test of a first-rate intelligence—"to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function"—he insulated himself from all the people he knew and went away by himself, 'I made lists and tore them up, hundreds of lists—of cavalry leaders and football players and cities, popular tunes and pitchers . . .'

These superficial symbols of the adolescent success world do not recur purely fortuitously. For only because Fitzgerald failed to become a hero as a footballer and as a soldier did he turn to literature as a recompense. 'Years later I realized that my failure

a big shot in college was all right—instead of serving on committees I took a beating on English poetry; when I got the idea of what was all about I set about learning how to write. On Shaw's principle that "If you don't get what you like, you better like what you get", it was a lucky break—at the moment it was a harsh and bitter business to know that my career as a leader of men was over.'

I have quoted these extracts from *The Crack-Up* in some detail; it is only through an understanding of Scott Fitzgerald himself, and through him of the twenties, that the subtleties of his novels and their subject matter as a commentary on their author, become properly inter-related. For what is interesting in Fitzgerald is the object-object relationship of the artistic process, the work in its relation to the man and the period, rather than the novels themselves. These disappoint, I think, largely because the execution hardly ever comes up to the planning, or to the personality of Fitzgerald himself. Reading *The Crack-Up*, *The Echoes of the Jazz Age*, the notes and notebooks, one expects better novels. For the fact remains that the sheer statement of Fitzgerald's themes is better than his embroidering of them. Only in *The Great Gatsby* does one get the feeling that writing is 'the sheer paring away of oneself' Fitzgerald wrote about to his daughter or 'of swimming under water and holding your breath'. Too often in the other novels and short stories one feels the author has come up for air and stayed up treading water.

About his first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), Fitzgerald wrote in a letter to Edmund Wilson in 1917, 'There are twenty-three chapters, all but five are written, and it is poetry, prose, verse and every mood of a temperamental temperature. It purports to be the picaresque ramble of one Stephen Palms (Dalius?) from the San Francisco fire, thru school, Princeton, to the end where at twenty-one he writes his autobiography at the Princeton aviation school. It shows traces of Tarkington, Chesterton, Chambers, Wells, Benson, Rupert Brooke and includes Compton Mackenzie-like love affairs and three psychic adventures including an encounter with the devil in a harlot's apartment . . . I can most easily describe it by calling it a prose, modernistic Childe Harold and really, if Scribner takes it, I'll wake some morning and find at the debutantes have made me famous overnight.'

Apart from the remarkably assured though prophetic last

sentence, the interest in this passage comes from its list of influences (In my own copy of the book I listed, without having read the letter, the names of Forster, Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Noel Coward, as all being in some way reflected or foreshadowed by the passages or aspects of technique in this book.) In many ways *This Side of Paradise* reads like an American adaptation of *The Longest Journey* with a generation's difference in time and Princeton instead of a Cambridge background. At the same time the technique, with its interlude in drama-form, is in its outline similar at moments to *Ulysses* and it is a remarkable coincidence that the discarded name for Fitzgerald's hero should have been Stephen Dalius. (*Ulysses* in fact did not appear till 1922, though it was begun in 1914.) The 'purple' passages of prose that are interwoven as poetic commentaries on the text are extremely similar in tone and language to those Virginia Woolf used ten years later in *The Waves*. The middle section called *The Debutante* might well have been written by Noel Coward.

From the diversity of these techniques it can be seen how much, stylistically anyway, *This Side of Paradise* was an innovation, and how much it contained within it the seed that other writers later cultivated in their own manners. In point of fact the synopsis quoted above refers to an earlier and much altered draft of Fitzgerald's novel. But into *This Side of Paradise* Fitzgerald put almost everything he had previously written, including poems and short stories, so that the finished version resembled nothing so much as the education of Beatrice O'Hara, the mother (and prototype of the American Woman) of Amory Blaine, the hero of the book. 'All in all, Beatrice O'Hara absorbed the sort of education that will be quite impossible ever again: a tutelage measured by the number of things and people one could be contemptuous of and charming about: a culture rich in all arts and traditions, barren of all ideas, in the last of those days when the great gardeners clipped the inferior roses to produce one perfect bud.'

Amory Blaine, whom Fitzgerald makes the same age as himself, is the forerunner of the rather shallow, charming, rich but unstable protagonist of all the Fitzgerald stories of the Jazz Age. *This Side of Paradise* traces a young man's adolescence from his innate handsome superiority to his disillusion and self-knowledge. It shows the impact of the outer world on an unsophisticated sensibility thirsting for sophistication. But Amory Blaine, like

Scott Fitzgerald, learned quickly. Very soon he was outwardly at least more sophisticated than his time and in fact, though typical of it, he imbued it with an aura of wickedness that a generation of débutantes and incipient war heroes delighted to feel. The sexual naivety of *This Side of Paradise*, its priggishness and self-assumption, date it now much more than the uninhibited twenties it came to symbolize. Scott Fitzgerald describes his own sexual revulsion in *The Crack-Up*. When 'it seemed on one March afternoon that I had lost every single thing I wanted—and that night was the first time I hunted down the spectre of womanhood . . .' In *This Side of Paradise*, Amory, after his first kiss, feels 'disgust, loathing for the whole incident'. It is the same sort of consensual disinterest, that yet has an appetite for the preliminaries and aura of glamour love sheds, that Fitzgerald's heroes find in money. The purity of money in comparison with the stigma of poverty is only one of the themes that Fitzgerald develops in hisides throughout his work. Money was one of the outward symbols of the spiritual grace that could only be found amongst the children of the Ritz. Fitzgerald's heroes are motivated by a guilt-complex about inherited wealth, but are controlled by an even greater indulgence towards it. Like moths, they are drawn to its light. Amory Blaine, who at the end of the book cries out 'I know myself, but that is all', fascinates, not for the superficial charm Fitzgerald endows him with, but because he, as was Fitzgerald, is himself aware of something beyond him, inchoate and inexpressible, that could give the lie to his whole life and conduct. 'There was no God in his heart, he knew; his ideas were still in riot; there was ever the pain of memory: the regret for his lost youth—yet the waters of disillusion had left a deposit on his soul, responsibility and a love of life, the faint stirring of old ambitions and unrealized dreams.'

The barely veiled social snobbery of Fitzgerald's early writing seems, looking back on it, to have been a strange banner to have waved on a new generation—the 'lost' generation whose exile and 'lostness' Gertrude Stein cultivated in Paris till it became a literary phenomenon and an act of compensation. Amory Blaine, so, though Fitzgerald made him absolutely 'right' for his period, could hardly be said to represent the typical hero of the America that so took him to heart. It was only the very snobbishness that characterized Fitzgerald himself that came to his rescue in the

public that applauded him. Amory, with his luxurious pretensions, his poetic posturings, his would-be Byronism, was a 'step-up'. As it represented the spiritual progression of Fitzgerald's privileged adolescence, so *This Side of Paradise* became a manifesto for those who wanted the same sort of glamour out of less privileged lives.

Like nearly all the best novelists, Fitzgerald began as a poet. Despite his facility and too great a 'naturalness' of language, his whole prose style betrays the attempt to 'hit off' a mood or person exactly, in the way only poetry does. 'I might say', he wrote to his daughter, 'I don't think anyone can write succinct prose unless they have at least tried and failed to write a good iambic pentameter.' In another letter he wrote 'Again let me repeat that if you start any kind of career following the footsteps of Cole Porter and Rogers and Hart, it might be an excellent try. Sometimes I wish I had gone along with that gang, but I guess I am too much a moralist at heart, and really want to preach at people in some acceptable form, rather than to entertain them.'

These two strains, his perfectionism and his didacticism, are brought into sharper focus in *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922). In a letter to Edmund Wilson in 1918, Fitzgerald had written on *This Side of Paradise*, 'It damns much of Princeton, but it's nothing to what it thinks of men and human nature in general . . . I still agree with the early Wells on human nature and the "no hope for Tono Bungay" theory.' *The Beautiful and Damned* elaborates this contemptuous view of man in the same ardent idealist terms, only this time without a trace of cynicism. The impossibility of a love relationship that is the ultimate contention of *The Beautiful and Damned*, merely repeats the disillusion of Amory Blaine and foreshadows the deterioration of Anson Hunter in *The Rich Boy* and Dick Diver in *Tender is the Night*. Fitzgerald's view of love, so shallow and superficial at first sight, ends by terrifying through its final groping after truth. There is nothing, one thinks, to these gilded over-privileged creatures whose greatest fear is that they should ever give themselves whole-heartedly to anybody—then suddenly it dawns that that indeed is the real truth that Fitzgerald has seen himself. Not only do they destroy one another, but they destroy themselves because they penetrate their own void; and at the moment of their discovery of it they are left with nothing but their own knowledge. 'I know myself,' Amory Blaine said, 'but that is all.' Anthony Patch in *The Beautiful and Damned*, should

have ended saying the same thing but, as Paul Rosenfeld observed in an early essay on Fitzgerald (1925), 'though *The Beautiful and Damned* should have been a tragedy, the victims damned indeed, yet at the conclusion Fitzgerald welched and permitted his pitiful fair to have the alleviations of some thirty millions of dollars and his hero tell the readers he had won out . . .'

The sexual priggishness of Fitzgerald's characters is even evident twelve years later in *Tender is the Night* (1934). Yet in the meantime a lot of water had flowed under the bridge. *The Great Gatsby* (1925), the only real work of art in the strictest sense that Fitzgerald produced, was a parody of wealth in the same way as his fantasy *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz* (from a volume of short stories called *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922)), and its opening pages contain some of the particular quality of combined hope, awareness and nervous excitement that helped to make Fitzgerald the symbol of the 'lost generation'. 'When I came back from the East last autumn, I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention for ever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gave his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction—Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away . . . it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person . . .'

It is only a slight blurring in the presentation of Gatsby's own character that prevents *The Great Gatsby* from being as near to flawless as any novel can be. Fitzgerald wrote about this to John Peale Bishop, 'You are right about Gatsby being blurred and patchy. I never at one time saw him clear myself—for he started out as one man I knew and then changed into myself.' An enchanting letter from Mrs. Edith Wharton to Fitzgerald at about the same time, touches on a similar aspect: 'My present quarrel with you is only this: that to make Gatsby really great, you ought to have given us his early career instead of a short résumé of it. That would have situated him, and made his final tragedy a tragedy instead of a "fait divers" for the morning papers.'

Yet Mrs. Wharton's very criticism testifies in a sense to the truth and strict relevance of Gatsby to his time. His greatness is in his 'romantic readiness' which is essentially an ironic, unfulfilled quality like the early twenties themselves. Various critics have analysed the 'outsider' element in Fitzgerald—the literary recompense for his having been an 'outsider' himself—and *The Great Gatsby* is perhaps the best illustration of those who, as Maxwell Geismar puts it, 'resort to illegal means of achieving wealth and social position'. Gatsby, unlike Amory Blaine, but like Fitzgerald, did not inherit his entrée to the Long Island élite. He achieves what he does because of his singleness of purpose—in this case his passion for a socially smart girl who did not know what she wanted. What Gatsby schemes for, and ultimately does, is not for money itself, but for the fact that it will take him nearer to his beloved. Money plays the same part as sex in Fitzgerald's romantic ideology—it is a necessary equivalent but something that one should not soil one's hands with. So in the end when Gatsby is killed, the people who had enjoyed his fantastically lavish hospitality, all disown him. They cannot even bring themselves to attend his funeral. The rich, living by their own unrelated criteria, were careless people—'they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness'.

In this one novel, Fitzgerald exactly and beautifully canalized the various strands of his own temperament—his essential 'Westernness', his sensibility beyond the sensibility of the class he clung to; his detachment that despite appearances, made him always the observer. *The Great Gatsby* is full of those wonderfully illuminating, moving effects Fitzgerald pulled off at various times in his other books. It has a rhythm, a richness and economy combined with a gentleness of feeling that no other novelist of his time had achieved. It marked the climax of Fitzgerald's work from which all that followed was inevitably, and despite himself, a decline. For in Gatsby he had found the first symbol of an age, the first almost instinctive acceptance of something stronger than the world of Amory Blaine, of something that would not be acceptable to it but which was yet nearer to genuineness and which could afford to flout convention. Gatsby was a 'gentleman' in his own right, as a man, though his ancestors were not the proper ones. His story was the American success

tory in its most primitive form; but with this difference, that in Gatsby, with all his obvious affectation, his vulgarity and pathetic attempts at the grand manner, there existed a kind of purity of motive. So that his squalid downfall, the car-smash that led to it—the typical *deus ex machina* of American fiction and real life—came with the force of tragedy, not in the grand manner, but on the humble terms of Gatsby's unquenchable longing.

Fitzgerald himself was conscious of faults in *The Great Gatsby*—‘the lack of any emotional backbone’ he called it in a letter to Edmund Wilson—but at the same time its brilliance of construction, its planned smoothness set a standard for his two later novels, that despite the pure magazine fiction he wrote in between, remained. The eight years that preceded *Tender is the Night* were the years of the Riviera, of Antibes, Capri, Nice and Paris—a time of high-pressure living. ‘Zelda and I sometimes indulge in terrible four-day rows that always start with a drinking party, but we’re still enormously in love,’ and the beginning of the diffusion of energy which in the end led to *The Crack-Up*.

One of Fitzgerald’s greatest gifts was his flair for drawing instinctively on experiences he hadn’t yet had. He wrote in a piece called *Early Success* (1937): ‘All the stories that came into my head had a touch of disaster in them—the lovely young creatures in my novels went to ruin, the diamond mountains of my short stories blew up, my millionaires were as beautiful and as damned as Thomas Hardy’s peasants. In life these things hadn’t happened yet . . .’

But the main events of *Tender is the Night* had already begun to happen, not only in the depression that followed the ‘golden boom’, but in Fitzgerald’s own affairs. He had written in a letter from Paris: ‘I’m filled with disgust for Americans in general after two weeks’ sight of the ones in Paris—these preposterous, bushing women and girls who assume that you have any personal interest in them, who have all (so they say) read James Joyce and who simply adore Mencken . . . If I had anything to do with creating the manners of the contemporary American girl, I certainly made a botch of the job.’ In *Tender is the Night*, the French Riviera and Paris are made the background for a clinical study of insanity (the result of incest), of a shifting marriage relationship, and of a man’s gradual deterioration through drink. It is basically a novel of defeat, for the ‘promise of life’ that kept

Gatsby going has become an acceptance of disintegration. The rich American psychologist, round whom for a brief while a kind of Riviera society pivots, ends up after a broken marriage : small-town doctor in America. *Tender is the Night*, in the complexities of its plot, its numerous dependent themes, its facing-up to unpleasant domestic realities, was a novel on a bigger scale than anything Fitzgerald had yet attempted. It is carefully planned very consciously written and its final fading away meticulously calculated, yet the book as a whole never begins to hang together its emphases shift disconcertingly and its distaste for the very society it studies gives it a sort of fascinated apathy that none the less is not sufficiently intense to hold the interest. For it lacks to an even greater degree than did *Gatsby*, an 'emotional backbone'. Fitzgerald's very care in its construction has produced a 'worked over', uneven impression. The consciously casual writing seems loose and imprecise, though occasionally the magic of Fitzgerald's touch brings it to momentary life. The characters who are assembled for the scrutiny of Rosemary Hoyt, the young film star through whose eyes the story is originally seen, fade pathetically away, or meet tragic ends 'off stage', as she herself is shouldered out of the story to make way for Dick Diver's final hopeless withdrawal. This may in fact be the way things actually happen, but Fitzgerald makes it unconvincing because he fails to concentrate in the first place on building up his character, so that his ultimate disintegration lacks point. The whimper his world ends with is not paralleled by any comparable beginning. It is merely the defeat of the American Man by the American Woman.

The outlines of *Tender is the Night* are much more satisfactory than their implementation. Fitzgerald knew what points he wanted to make and made them. Dick Diver's return to America meant that yet one more means of salvation—the marriage relationship, even in the best of all possible worlds, the French Riviera—had been destroyed. But within the broad terms of the theme, nothing is seen very clearly. One senses all the time that Fitzgerald's own feelings were too close to his characters, his own story too much theirs—so that in his attempt to formalize them in detached characters he could not separate himself except by deliberately falsifying the truth. It is precisely where artfulness is substituted for reality that the book fails to convince and continues downhill with its characters.

Fitzgerald wrote to Edmund Wilson that he considered Dick Diver an 'homme épuisé' rather than simply an 'homme manqué', and so justified in fading away without conflict. But even then this is not suggested convincingly, and comes too much as a surprise. In an inscribed copy of his book which he gave to David Garnett, Fitzgerald wrote 'Dear David Garnett: Notice how neatly I stole and adapted your magnificent ending to *Lady into Fox* (which I know practically as I used to know the Lord's Prayer in my Catholic days)—by heart.'

This, besides the fact that it appeared first as a magazine serial, may in part account for the episodic handling of Fitzgerald's scheme. The book was written under separate title-heads that do not flow into each other, but were conceived first. And sometimes, for all Fitzgerald's rewriting ('I have driven the Scribner proof-readers half nuts') the various sections do not quite join up. So the transcribed ending as well, from Fitzgerald's own evidence, is seen to be conceived as a technical turn of the screw, rather than the result of the characters' interior development.

This may or may not be quite relevant criticism, but in Fitzgerald's last, unfinished novel, *The Last Tycoon* (1941), we get a much closer insight into his technique and it seems that in its final version Fitzgerald would have eradicated many of the discursive faults of *Tender is the Night*.

Whatever one's views about *The Last Tycoon* as a novel, Fitzgerald's notes for it, his individual studies of the characters, his development of ideas into episodes, his discussion of alternative actions, make fascinating reading. To read the notes Edmund Wilson has collected about it, including Fitzgerald's own synopsis made for the editor of a magazine, and then to compare them with the various draft stages is like watching a sculpture emerging from a mass of stone. The whole technique is deliberate in the way that only Henry James of the novelists of this century has been deliberate. Fitzgerald approaches his material first objectively through his synopsis narrative, then discusses the reactions of each character at their intersecting points, and finally recasts characters and episodes in the light of the conclusions he comes to after his 'horizontal' analyses. The result, even in the still undecided form it was in when Fitzgerald died, shows the seriousness with which he approached this task of writing, for the first time, 'from the outside'.

The Last Tycoon is a study of the film industry, not in its effects on those round the fringes (as in West's *Day of the Locust*), but on the lives of those at its centre. Fitzgerald had been in Hollywood some time when he wrote it, but it is none the less the only one of his novels in which the central character is being observed critically during his creation. He is outside Monroe Stahr, the film director who bears the story on his shoulders like a Colossus and who becomes responsible for the destiny of all the other characters, in a way he never got outside Amory Blaine, Anthony Patch, Gatsby or Dick Diver.

But it is not really possible to comment on the writing of *The Last Tycoon* because it was still unformed. Certainly, though it lacks the perfection of *The Great Gatsby*, it contains a sober, more certain approach to character. There is no 'blurring' through the characters not being sufficiently clearly conceived. 'There's nothing that worries me in the novel . . . unlike *Tender is the Night*, it is not the story of deterioration—it is not depressing and morbid in spite of the ending . . . I hope it will be something new, arouse new emotions, perhaps even a new way of looking at certain phenomena. I have set it safely in a period of five years ago to obtain detachment . . . it is an escape into a lavish, romantic past that will perhaps not come again into our time.'

That is the last passage in Fitzgerald's long synopsis, which details both the point of narrative of the story—it is seen through the eyes of a film producer's daughter: 'she is of the movies but not in them, she probably was born the day *The Birth of a Nation* was previewed and Rudolf Valentino came to her fifth birthday party'—the love affair that is the meat of the book and the nearest Fitzgerald ever comes to the description of passion, the symbolization of the goodness of the film industry with Stahr's defeat in it and his subsequent death in an air-crash (a variation of the usual car accident finale). The main theme, as Fitzgerald stated it, was that Stahr could not bring himself to marry Kathleen, an 'unimportant' girl who reminded him of his dead wife. 'She is tagged with a middle-class exterior which doesn't fit in with the grandeur Stahr demands of life. When she realizes this she leaves him temporarily, leaves him not because he has no legal intentions towards her but because of the hurt of it . . .'

There are many echoes in this of Fitzgerald's first defeat—the girl who turned him down because he wasn't a success—in this

case a sexual inversion of it, and also of the 'romantic escape', Fitzgerald's whole career demonstrated so vainly. In his study of Hollywood he could not bring into action the political acumen and conscience Nathanael West was able to ('Politics', Fitzgerald once wrote, 'is only "an element of irony" in my work'), but he imbued it with an authenticity of sentiment that is nearer the mark of a pure novelist than any more sociologically valid conclusions.

I. But *The Last Tycoon* is full of fascinating technical problems that in themselves make it a book of permanent interest, of interest outside the mere achievement of it, as Fitzgerald himself was more important as a legend and a symbol to his generation than as a novelist.

So one comes back to the 'clarification of nostalgia' I mentioned at the beginning. Fitzgerald's relation to his work, his work's relation to himself, these are both evident in this 'final escape into a lavish, romantic past'. The brilliant short stories, the wit and crystalline quality of imagery his note-books abound in, the irony that never really became satire, all date back in origin to his failure to become a leader of men at Princeton. This forced, magically uneven talent tried all along to compensate itself for its first hurt. Fitzgerald's achievement was an effort of will, a professional victory over the dilettantism that was indigenous in him and in his generation.

His myths, like Gatsby's, were conceived early in his life. In Gatsby, Fitzgerald admired the single-mindedness he himself lacked. His own weakness both broke him and gave him a tragically short-lived rebirth. But he was reborn, in the uphill fight of his last years, a different person. His real self, as the age to which he belonged and of which he will be ever regarded the official chronicler, died a decade before. In the world of *The Last Tycoon*, Fitzgerald had no place in character except as a witness of his own remarkable recovery, 'by this I mean', he wrote to his daughter, 'the thing that lies behind all great careers, from Shakespeare's to Abraham Lincoln's, and as far back as there are books to read—the sense that life is essentially a cheat and its conditions are those of defeat, and that the redeeming things are not "happiness and pleasure", but the deeper satisfactions that come out of struggle'. That in itself is enough comment on Fitzgerald's disillusion and his spiritual progression since the best days of the Jazz Age.

SELECTED NOTICE

The Middle of The Journey. By Lionel Trilling. Secker & Warburg. 12s. 6d.

The first and the enduring emotion is gratitude to Mr. Trilling for writing a book which is so thoughtful, intelligent and solid. There is material here for our teeth, whether to masticate and digest or to chew and expectorate or simply to gnash at. This is, in the old phrase, a novel which cannot be disregarded. It is important as perhaps a dozen novels in the last decade have been important. And because it deserves a deeply respectful consideration to which critics, in these barren years, have become unaccustomed, it seems necessary to write only after the first suffusing flush of gratitude has passed. In the low context of this year's 'good' novels, words like 'masterpiece' and 'perfection' would trip fluently off the pen. But that vocabulary is inflated and it would be disrespectful to use it in considering Mr. Trilling. We must judge him in the terms we use for judging Malraux or Sartre, Silone or Svevo, Waugh or Henry Green, Fitzgerald or Hemingway. And to do this it seems best to discuss first of all what this book is not, what it has not attempted to be.

The Middle of the Journey is a complex thesis on the predicament of modern man, illustrated by imaginary individuals and events. By this I mean that Mr. Trilling is a novelist like Disraeli, like Gissing, like Samuel Butler, like Aldous Huxley and like Koestler rather than like Jane Austen, like Dickens, like Turgeniev, like Melville or Joyce. I believe that the first impulse of this book was a statement, a complex yet specific statement about the nature of man and the nature of his present environment. Because Mr. Trilling is a professor of literature and one of America's most distinguished literary critics, it was natural that he should choose the novel as the form in which he could expound his conclusions with the greatest eloquence and clarity. After reading his book one can hardly doubt that he chose right, but it is important to remember that another medium *might* have been used without loss of the essential statement. It is not that the characters in this book are dummies or that the situations are mere contrivances : it is simply that the characters and the situations are memorable chiefly for what they illustrate, for the points that they so effectively make.

The manner of the book is strongly affected both by this fact and, quite as much, by the fact that Mr. Trilling is a critic of very great intelligence and considerable severity. It is written principally with that restrained care which gives a certain anonymity to the work of so many reputable modern novelists in England and America—'It would never have occurred to anyone who chanced to notice John Laskell drinking his coffee that he was a man likely to be troubled by an anxiety about not reaching his destination by railroad, or likely to find adventurousness in so ordinary an act as drinking a cup of coffee at a station counter. He took his hat off when he sat down at the counter, and now he was perhaps rather noticeable, for he was strikingly pale and his hair was cut very much shorter than is usual with a man of his general appearance, a man who was well and casually dressed in grey flannel and white Oxford shirt and bright striped tie.' It is the careful, unemphatic language

which many modern writers have adopted from a justifiable fear of flamboyance. It is supremely the writing of the critic who is steering with address between cliché and *jeu d'esprit*, between the banal and the exhibitionist, between the familiar horrors of journalism and the fanciful horrors of 'literature'. It is a good way of writing when the purpose of writing is to convey information. Perhaps it is the only way in which good novels can now be written, since whenever we try to write in another way we are instantly conscious of the strain, of the inflation, of the reaching after felicities, of the quest for the golden or the lurid word. But if this is the conclusion to which Mr. Trilling has come then one must say that, though he may be right, it is a sad conclusion, and that the intelligent, inoffensive manner of his book is also, except in the brilliant passages of dialogue, undistinguished and immemorable.

But Mr. Trilling has not written a critic's book, a dry little demonstration of how to avoid faults. In its matter his book is immensely full-blooded, and he has tackled the great dangerous themes armed not only with a wonderful intellectual equipment but also with a fine courage. Of his technique, his organization and architecture I can say no more here than that they are brilliantly adequate to his great thesis. He plays few tricks and these few are wholly successful. He varies the pace of his narrative with great effect. In all that wide area which is called 'construction' and which falls between the language and the message, between the detailed vocabulary and the general statement, Mr. Trilling displays the great advantages of being a thoroughly clever man. No doubt he puzzled long, but he discovered happy solutions. His book is finely conceived.



The Middle of the Journey recounts the spiritual and intellectual development of John Laskell, a thirty-three-year-old American of the cultivated middle-classes. A serious illness coincides with the defection of an admired friend, Gifford Maxim, from the Communist Party. Surviving the real danger of death, Laskell retires to the country for his convalescence, staying there with a young couple, Nancy and Arthur Croom, his closest friends, who have shared in the past his common-sense fellow-travelling views. During the course of a few months and under the pressure of various people and events, Laskell's total outlook on life is transformed. Indeed it would be truer to say that this is the story, not so much of a development as of an illumination. Like Forster, on whom he has written the best existing critical study, Mr. Trilling is a dramatic, not a discursive, novelist. His novel is a series of dramatic events, linked together by slow passages of development.

Chronologically, though not in their narrative order, the principal dramatic events of the book are these. Maxim visits Laskell and asks him to receive certain letters which will be addressed to him in a particular way, and to pass them on unopened: Laskell refuses. Laskell falls ill, and is visited by Maxim who tells him that he has left the Party and is on the run for fear of assassination by his ex-comrades. It transpires that Maxim has been for the last few months, on secret Party business and that his earlier request to Laskell was associated with this. Arriving at the station for his convalescence, Laskell finds that the Crooms have failed to meet him and he is suddenly possessed

by a sensation of ultimate, inexplicable terror. Laskell discovers that the Crooms, young, intelligent, optimistic, kind, are offended and disgusted by his attempt to describe to them his sensations in hospital. To them death is an obscenity which they refuse to contemplate. After much hesitation Laskell tells the Crooms about Maxim's defection: they are outraged by it, and outraged with Laskell. They refuse to believe either, as Laskell already suspects, that Maxim's secret business was assassination, or that there was any reality in his fears for his own life. Laskell befriends and loves Susan Caldwell, the fifteen-year-old daughter of Emily and 'Duck' Caldwell. He makes love to Emily Caldwell, the natural feminine figure of the book who is despised by the Crooms. Maxim arrives in a caravan, transformed into a neo-catholic whose obsessive intention is to convict everyone of guilt. Susan is killed by her father, the drunken and lecherous 'Duck' Caldwell, who has always been admired by the Crooms for his 'reality'. Maxim makes a supreme attempt to convict Laskell of blood-guilt, first by suggesting that he had tried to kill 'Duck' in revenge, and then by insisting on the guilt of the whole human race, the guilt which comes from 'our and Adam's fall'. The climax of the book, and the final elucidation of its many obscure events is a ferocious struggle for the soul of Laskell conducted by Maxim, with the unwitting support of the Crooms.

Maxim, intolerably eloquent at every moment, states the issue epigrammatically: "For you (the Crooms)—no responsibility for the individual, but no forgiveness. For me—ultimate, absolute responsibility for the individual, but mercy." But Laskell, escaping from his second great peril, suddenly sees that Maxim and the Crooms are two sides of the same medal. The Crooms, so bright, so anxious for improvement, will turn, because of their utter disregard of the individual, into fanatics and monsters. The Communist Party lies ahead of them, and they will become Communists, not despite Maxim's terrible revelation but because of it. They are the blind instruments of an almost obscene optimism. Maxim, because of what he has done and what he has witnessed, tries to involve the whole world in his guilt. He has viciously despaired of the human race, and he will destroy it out of disgust and hatred. And Laskell resists them both. "Is it really a question?" he asks. "An absolute freedom from responsibility—that much of a child none of us can be. An absolute responsibility—that much of a divine or metaphysical essence none of us can be" . . . They were very angry. . . . He knew why they were angry with him. It was the anger of the masked will at the appearance of an idea in modulation. The open will does not show that anger; only the will masked in virtue shows it. His idea, which he now saw as nothing much of an idea, had affronted them.' Maxim's final attempt on Laskell concludes the book: "You know it as well as I do. The day for being human in the way you feel now is over. Gone. Done for. Finished. Maybe it will come again. But not for a long time, John, not until the Crooms and I have won and established ourselves against the anarchy of the world," and a little later, "The supreme act of the humanistic, critical intelligence—it perceives the cogency of the argument and aquiesces in the fact of its own extinction." To which Laskell answers, with what are virtually his curtain lines, "You have been very clever, Maxim. Cleverer than I thought a man could ever be. But you are wrong on one point—I do not acquiesce."

It is, of course, a highly stilted conclusion, this dramatic argument between Maxim and Laskell, but its effect is tremendous. The full meaning and pattern of the book becomes suddenly and startlingly apparent. During his illness Laskell had confronted, *and welcomed*, death. His terror on the railway station was the terror of the foetus struggling from the claustrophobic horrors of the womb; it was his rebirth into life, but into a life transformed by the knowledge of death. This experience has equipped him for his gradual illumination. He is aided in it by Emily Caldwell, the superficially silly and mannered woman, whose understanding of life, of love and of death is deep and unreflecting. Thus equipped, Laskell is able to see what is so desperately wrong with the Crooms and yet to resist the easy alternative which Maxim offers. Yet the grossest misinterpretation of this book would be to suggest that it is a defence of the middle course, of common sense, of the avoidance of extremes. Laskell's final and saving illumination is his sudden understanding that Maxim and the Crooms are at the same extreme, and that he is at the other. Maxim debases man by making him guilty, stricken and vile: the Crooms debase man by making him an irresponsible statistical unit. Maxim is in love with death; the Crooms deny death. But Laskell is able to give man his full stature—'neither beast nor angel' is Maxim's contemptuous comment—because he has overcome and yet accepted death.

The real excellence of this book lies in Trilling's wonderful perception of the perennial issues which lie behind the political and intellectual conflicts of our time. His story is bedded in a period, the period of the Spanish Civil War, and the multitude of characters are described with a sharp and admirable realism. But he has been able, as very few political novelists of our time have been able, to understand that political points of view are manifestations and not ultimates. Malraux, Koestler and Silone have all achieved something of this understanding, but Trilling's novel derives little from any of these. If he is influenced it is rather by Henry James and E. M. Forster. In fact he is very consciously a novelist, a skilful and exciting narrator, a fine architect and a dramatist whose rare lapses into melodrama can be easily forgiven. I have suggested earlier that he has used the novel form for the illustration of a thesis but he has used it brilliantly. The whole book is studded with sudden perceptions, a perpetual *obbligato* of incidental wisdom. It is never dull, even during the many passages when, by the obvious rules, it certainly ought to be. A novel, indeed, which cannot be disregarded.

PHILIP TOYNBEE

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